Screen

Volume 45 number 4 Winter 2004

Dissonant voices of new Turkish cinema

***Wife Swap* and the drama of banality**

Audiovisual pleasure and narrative cinema in *Jackie Brown*

Gallery films and vertical time

Studio logos and the aesthetics of memory and hype

Dossiers:

Production/set design

Trauma

Subscription & order information:
Screen (ISSN 0036–9543) is published quarterly in March, June, September, December by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. Annual subscription price for institutions of UK and Europe £99, USA and Rest of the World US$179. Personal subscriptions £44 for UK and Europe and US$74 USA and Rest of the World, and for Students and Unemployed UK and Europe £27, USA and Rest of the World US$48. The current plus two back volumes are available from Oxford University Press. Previous volumes can be obtained from the Periodicals Service Company, 11 Main Street, Germantown, NY 12526 USA. Tel: +1(518)537 4700 Fax: +1(518)537 5899. *Screen is distributed by* Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey, NJ 07001, USA. Periodical postage paid at Newark, New Jersey, USA and additional entry points.
US POSTMASTER: send address changes to Screen, c/o Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey, NJ 07001, USA.

Payment is required with all orders and subscriptions are accepted and entered by the volume(s). Payment may be made by the following methods: Cheque (made payable to Oxford University Press), National Girobank (Account 500 1056). Credit Card (*Mastercard, Visa, American* Express), UNESCO Coupons. Bankers: Barclays Bank plc, PO Box 333, Oxford Code 20–65–18. Account 00715654. Individual rates apply only when copies are sent to a private address and are paid for by personal cheque or credit card.

Please send orders and requests for sample copies to: Journals Subscriptions Department, Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP.
Tel: +44(0)1865 267907.
Fax: +44(0)1865 267485.
Email: jnl.orders@oup.co.uk

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ISSN 0036–9543

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Printed by Bell and Bain Ltd.

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cover illustration

Clouds of May (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 1999)

Reality TV, *Wife Swap* and the drama of banality

HELEN PIPER

I can remember when the telly meant something. If you watched a documentary, watched a drama, they made you think about life and not whether you had the right wallpaper to match your kecks.[1]

Prone as we are to mistrusting innovation, it is ironic that at the same time as John Caughie should be penning an elegy for a 'serious' drama practice that mattered to public culture,[2] the clamour against new genres should begin in earnest, precisely because they seem to matter quite as much as they do. By May 2003, the experience of shows such as *Wife Swap* (Channel 4, 2003–) and *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here* (ITV1, 2002–), along with the prospect of a summer of 'sick TV', prompted various commentators, psychologists and Tessa Jowell, the Minister for Culture, to call for a viewer 'revolt'. Jowell's argument, in particular, was that 'quality' drama, comedy and current affairs were all under threat as broadcasters fell over themselves to cater for what, by implication, were increasingly debased pleasures.[3]

My objective in this paper is to explore certain aesthetic issues that arise from the dichotomous relation between drama and reality television, partly in order to refigure the debate outside of well-rehearsed arguments for and against 'dumbing down'. The arrival of reality formats such as the docusoap was greeted in many quarters as a mutation (or aberration) of the documentary tradition, and the new formats' increasing reliance on fictional techniques has almost invariably been a source of regret.[4] That is, the emphasis is largely on what they are no longer (factual, and for this we can also read 'objective', serious, truth-telling, and so on), rather than what they have

1 Speech made by the character Jimmy Corkhill in the final episode of the long-running soap *Brookside*, Channel 4, 4 November 2003.

2 John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

3 John Arlidge, 'Cruelty TV', *The Observer*, 18 May 2003, p. 18.

4 See, for example, Dai Vaughan, 'Notes on the ascent of a fictitious mountain', in John Corner (ed.), *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp. 161–75.

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become (dramatic, or perhaps 'playful', in both senses of the term). Of course, the degree to which even pre-existing situations and events can be legitimately reconstructed, mediated and thereby re-presented has, since Grierson, been debated to exhaustion. However, as Jon Dovey notes, the turbulence of 1990s programming has for some time signified 'the demise of the "claim on the real" that has sustained documentary to date. It has gone, over, finished with. Documentary and factual TV now exist in a space that is neither wholly fictional nor wholly factual, both yet neither.'[5]

It is my argument that texts such as *Wife Swap* are pushing such a space further and further towards the fictive boundary, to the point at which documentary criteria themselves are no longer appropriate, indeed are obscuring the narrative innovations and potential use values of an entire new generation of television. As I shall show – and were it not for the few remaining conventions of nonfiction programming – characteristics such as the active and deliberate construction of a profilmic event on a self-conscious stage, and the deployment of fictive narrative structures and affective techniques, would all otherwise classify this particular series squarely within the category of (improvised) drama. Crucially, however, this paper in no way looks to associate this process of fictionalization with a loss of seriousness, but seeks to open up a generic space in which individual texts might be evaluated on their own terms. By presenting increasing fictionalization as a phenomenon driven by 'entertainment' (rather than drama), and contrasting this with traditional documentary, both Dovey in *Freakshow* and Richard Kilborn in *Staging the Real*, however unintentionally, effectively reify the old Platonic association of 'reality' with seriousness, and fiction with frivolity.[6]

Wife Swap itself is proposed here as an exemplary text, although by no means as a typical model of the reality TV 'genre' as a whole. Nevertheless, it rather neatly demonstrates two relatively recent trends. First, there is the gravitation of nonfiction formats towards domestic banality and away from their original reliance on the emergency services that replicated the fast action life-and-death scenarios of crime and medical dramas. Since the 1990s, the content of reality shows has become increasingly humdrum, foregrounding the stories and crises of individuals in more everyday occupations and domestic settings (apparently echoing the saturation of lifestyle/makeover/property formats). Second, so-called 'reality' initiatives have also increasingly sought to evacuate any premiss of 'the real' from these settings by substituting laboratory-style 'experiments' or competition formats for pre- (or independently) existing profilmic situations.

Stephen Lambert's three series of *Wife Swap* have also been something of a ratings success for Channel 4, with the first in particular rapidly building an audience of nearly six million, ironically at the expense of a BBC1 drama series (*Red Cap*).[7] The first series also elicited an excited response from reviewers, evidently torn in the now

5 Jon Dovey, *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 11.

6 Richard Kilborn, *Staging the Real: Factual TV Programming in the Age of Big Brother* (New York, NY and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

7 See URL: http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/entertainment/tv_and_radio/2683793.stm. *Wife Swap* series one, tx 10 January to 28 January 2003; series two, tx 30 September to 11 November 2003; series three, tx 29 June to 27 July 2004.

paradigmatic dilemma of fascination/contempt for a form at once 'compulsive' and 'repugnant'. When it returned for a second, longer run later in the year, ratings remained high, and although journalistic critique exhibited a far lesser sense of outrage, the series continued to exercise popular public discourse, providing no shortage of what, in transatlantic coinage, have come to be known as 'water cooler moments'. The phenomena under discussion in this paper are by no means restricted to *Wife Swap* – and, to an extent, any study of 'reality TV' is outdated before publication – yet an initial emphasis on this series would seem justified by the manner in which it so quickly became 'the template for factual television'[8] and perhaps marked an irreversible step in a long process of boundary blurring.

8 Andrew Billen, 'The ratings war', *New Statesman*, 15–30 December 2003, p. 107.

Story, stage and situation

Temporally, *Wife Swap* differs significantly from what one could call the 'constant surveillance' model of reality TV that is exemplified by *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000–). Each series of *Wife Swap* comprises discrete one-hour episodes, each of which presents a heavily edited and clearly selective account of an experiment in which two wives exchange families, households and domestic routines for a fortnight. The 'swap' is not a contest, but presented as a collective process of 'working though', a chance to explore certain questions such as those explicitly announced by the voiceover commentary at the beginning of each programme: 'What's it like to try out a different spouse for a fortnight? Will the experience alter their views on their own family life?' Each episode is self-contained, although following transmission some of the participants are available for live chat on the Channel 4 website, and the first editions of both the second and third series were succeeded by follow-up specials entitled *Wife Swap Changed Our Marriage*. There are variations in content and emphasis from episode to episode and, to a degree, between the series,[9] although the structural and strategic formula has remained fairly consistent throughout the runs, and even survived translation into a new strand, *Boss Swap*, in January 2004.

9 The second series also included an edition in which 'house husbands' exchanged duties, as well as a celebrity special.

Every episode conforms to a conventional narrative pattern: the pre-existing equilibrium of family life is disrupted by the swap; difficulties with the new arrangement are encountered and there are attempts to repair emerging problems; these build to a crisis – usually during the second week – either between the newly paired couples or because one of the partners is obliged by the experiment to face up to longstanding problems in their usual relationship. After this an equilibrium of sorts is reinstated when the wives return to their rightful families, and usually a reformed order is established as each couple discusses the lessons learnt and speculates on how their relationship might be affected by what has passed. For convenience, most of the examples I shall give are taken from the final (and, admittedly, least

sensational) episode of series one, in which the two couples are Rob and Ann Bagley and Diane and Graham Kelly, each with two teenage children.

Quite apart from the conscious composition of particular frames, *Wife Swap* is – in at least two senses – 'staged': it is an event that has been organized and carried out, and it is a performance of an action on a stage. As with *Big Brother* and its countless successors, the situation has been designed and set up just as a dramatic scenario might be conceived for a piece of improvized theatre. Moreover, the mise-en-scene is itself a focus of attention and serves a dramatic function that goes beyond the requirements of credible background detail. Immediately upon entering Diane's house Ann complains of the clutter and points out to camera the arrangement of food items in the fridge; her anxious desire to change things is clearly going to be a source of tension. In a rather different fashion, Diane too is heavily affected by her new surroundings and she comments on her discomfort at being in another woman's house. In both cases the mode of address elicits a detached awareness of the stage properties. There is clearly an affective invitation here to identify with the women's feelings and responses, but there is also an invitation to judge according to subjective concepts of 'normal' (and by implication abnormal) domestic arrangements. 'We are considered reasonably trendy by other people', announces Rob's voice over a shot of two CDs, followed by closeups of various celebrity cookbooks on their shelves. 'We like Mediterranean food, European food, brasseries, Italian food.' Cut to a shot of a full wine rack placed incongruously in the toilet. The primary emphasis is on the class and aspirational connotations of the various cultural symbols, inviting affinity or disaffinity with this display of consumer tastes. One's attention is also drawn to the potential mismatch between voice and image: the camera continually invites the viewer to compare first-person statements against visual evidence. Music, on the other hand, tends to confirm the visual image, sometimes for humorous effect. There is, for example, a brief sequence concluding with Ann's frustrated declaration 'If I've got to do it all, I'll do it all', that gives way to the popular lyrics 'It takes two, baby ... to make a dream come true'. Nevertheless, such touches of levity are measured as, for the most part, these incidents and frustrations are treated seriously. That is, they are presented as being of some consequence, no matter how trivial or commonplace their cause – a central tenet of fictive realism.

Even at this early expositional stage, *Wife Swap* demonstrates the even propensity of such programmes for the narrative conventions of drama *and* documentary. Rather than attempting to follow individuals (as in, say, an observational documentary or docusoap), the programme tends to reveal 'clues' about what might seem to be types, as if introducing 'characters' whose role may be predefined by a meaningful story, but whose personality might deserve contemplation. In evident contrast to Rob and Ann's self-defined 'trendiness', the voiceover

announces that Graham and Diane have an altogether 'different approach to domestic life'. The proposition is that Graham (who works as a baker and does few home chores) and Diane (who works outside the home as well as organizing and servicing the household) have a more traditional setup, thus providing a fairly familiar and typically dramatic opposition between the 'residual' couple with a clear, if unequal, demarcation of roles, and the 'emergent' egalitarian couple who share breadwinning, childrearing and domestic tasks. The two couples are introduced economically, through a montage sequence taking in their direct addresses to camera and other choice aural soundbites to overlay images of them at home, driving, packing, and so on. Ann's domestic dominance and detailed efficiency is immediately contrasted with Diane's willing and slapdash homeliness, and Rob's potentially 'downtrodden' co-operation is juxtaposed with Graham's somewhat chauvinistic solicitude. What is rather interesting however – and I shall come to this shortly – is the way in which the narrative shifts and turns and effectively problematizes the initial stereotypes it has so glibly set up.

The sign-laden opening montage sequences are extremely rapid, referencing a sort of cultural shorthand about class and lifestyle, and, although the duration of shots does sometimes lengthen, the snappy succession of images remains characteristic of the programme's visual strategy. On those occasions when the tempo does relax, however, the action and dialogue begin to resemble a dramatic scene, heightening the significance of particular incidents and, arguably, offering pleasures that come close to intimate engagement with fictional representations. There is, for example, a long sequence paralleling the two women's preparation for dinner on their first day. Whilst Diane is in a supermarket buying the ingredients for Ann's prescribed recipe of 'chilli lemon-splashed fish', she offers candid and endearing confessions to camera – she has 'never ate an olive', nor an aubergine ('fresh *or* dried') – in a monologue that comes across as a metaphor for a more personal process of self-definition. The sequence is followed by another, more protracted one in which Ann prepares the evening meal after a full day's work, whilst Graham simply watches from various positions in the kitchen. The camera, like Graham, seems often to be in the way, and during the frequent, and unedited, pauses in conversation, the atmosphere simmers with Ann's barely contained frustration.

During such scenes, the camera switches between being shaky, predatory and encircling the participants, and pulling back to frame them, often collectively, sometimes to a voiceover in which they are described by a different character. Whereas this use of a single hand-held camera is entirely in keeping with the 'actuality' rhetoric of many fly-on-the-wall documentaries, the manner in which it intercuts the space between participants and then objectifies them from a distance also accommodates both the 'dramatic look' and the 'documentary gaze' that Caughie has identified.[10] Although much of the rhetoric of

10 Caughie, *Television Drama*, p. 111.

classic realist narrative has been abandoned (notably the point-of-view shot that is, in any event, uncommon in television drama) the use of 'looks' is still dramatic in so far as it operates an exchange between the characters who both look and are looked at. Nevertheless, their apparent ability for active agency is qualified by the setting of actual houses and the use of natural lighting that together have the effect of cramping the characters within the mise-en-scene. Although, arguably, they do have the autonomy of speech denied to the actor with a script, their status in driving and determining the narrative seems to be considerably diminished by this.

Furthermore, according to Dovey's borrowed literary distinction, Diane's supermarket monologue is not 'autobiographical self-speech', but 'biographical direct speech', although the heavily post-produced style makes no sustained pretence otherwise. Both Diane and Ann are playing out unscripted scenes within a highly organized (and therefore, in one sense, 'scripted' structure). As Dovey also points out, however, within the category of biographical direct speech there is a whole range of possible subjective modalities relating to different sets of power relations. According to his typology, Diane's candid remarks, although 'confessional' in one sense, might also be seen as an example of *witnessing* because she is first-speaking her experience of the process. Aside from its legalistic connotations, witnessing also has a specifically Protestant history that Dovey unravels, concluding that it can be a way of asserting 'the ontology of self in a way that is implicitly linked to a collective identity'.[11] As well as pre-empting Foucauldian critiques of reality TV as simple variations of the confessional, this offers a rather useful insight into the ideological strategy of *Wife Swap*, particularly in the context of the programme structure. Diane is not, after all, asserting her own idiosyncratic ignorance in never having eaten an olive, rather she is asserting a possible subject position in opposition to Ann's *type*, and its deployment of food as an expression of middle-class superiority. So although the two couples have broadly comparable incomes, properties, and so on, it is difficult not to read the opposition in class terms. Diane and Ann are not, to use another of Dovey's phrases, 'spectacles of particularity' but the dramatic agents in a narrative of class division that displaces economic factors with the new criteria of lifestyle, taste and diet, and which, of course, associates these with other binaries such as traditional/egalitarian roles in private relationships.

11 Dovey, *Freakshow*, p. 113.

It is not, then, so much that domestic job-sharing is represented as a matter of class politics (although one could read an implication of this) but that it ceases to be a matter purely of interpersonal negotiation (contingent on a whole range of other factors) and becomes a matter of self assertion, of personal or joint identity. To put it crudely, the sort of couple who scrupulously share responsibility for chores are the sort of couple who like to regard themselves as 'trendy'. By implying that the two couples are representatives of broader collectives – lifestyle

classes, as it were – the text also makes rather uncomfortable its own implicit invitation to judge. You might share Ann's distaste of Diane's family's reliance on deep-fried food, for example, but does that then oblige you to identify with her other lower-middle-class pretensions, such as an insistence on the right shade of toilet paper? Judgement is also complicated by the availability of multiple subject positions. Using a technique ably exploited in the epic series *Castaway* (BBC1, 2000), *Wife Swap* permits intimate insight into the sensibilities of all four spouses by means of private 'video diary' confidences. With the possible exception of Graham (and I shall return to the matter of his 'characterization' shortly) this footage is selected so as to maximise the possibility of sympathy with participants and their points of view, often giving them a 'right of reply'. Ostensibly, at least, it is the couples that critique each other, as even though there is clearly a directorial meta-argument in operation, this shifts and continually contradicts the very assumptions it previously encouraged. It is also less easy to condemn characters when one has been party to their candid and intimate expressions of emotion. Nevertheless, it is perhaps the tensions and interactions between each newly-paired couple that offer the greatest scope for complex and multiple subjectivities and empathy: all of which bespeaks not only skilful casting but the inherent possibilities of 'misfiring' in the format itself.[12]

It is Diane and Rob who, by the second week, appear to be enjoying the most harmonious arrangement, encouraging a sense that Ann would normally tend towards domineering over-organization of her rightful household. When Diane is able to introduce her own rules, she engineers an evening when Rob goes to the gym (for 'some time to himself') and the two daughters are allowed to bring friends home. However, the initial suggestion that this scenario is a liberating exercise is effectively contradicted when images of the evening's 'success' (teenage girls generating noise and consuming forbidden junk food) are followed by a lingering shot of Rob, looking rather forlorn as he imbibes a solitary drink at the gym, and his later admission that he has missed being involved in his daughters' social lives.

Moreover, the apparently consistent portrait of Ann as a bossy perfectionist is similarly undermined by her coupling with Graham, a man fond of reactionary gender politics who soon begins to take pleasure from baiting and exasperating his new 'wife' and parading his own vulgarity. As the experiment wears on, she becomes a more sympathetic figure, pushed to the point of exasperation. The modification of characterization effected by interpersonal conflict is part of an essentially dramatic strategy, although the very complexity in this instance gives rise to further opportunities for misfiring. Multiple objects of identification (and therefore multiple subject positions) are of course far more characteristic of television than of film drama due to the former's largely ensemble nature and, perhaps, its need to garner a wider demographic. Yet such a complex characterization as *Wife Swap*

12 The latter concept is originally of Judith Butler's coinage, although Janet Harbord deploys it rather effectively to demonstrate the unpredictability of film reception. See Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage 2002).

presents is still relatively uncommon in television fiction, the narrative function of which is often plot driven and/or might well be to 'make sense' of a social phenomenon through underlying binary oppositions, so rarely supplying more 'traits' than the narrative structure requires. The ambiguities illustrated above are to an extent excessive and certainly work to muddy the narrative waters, denying a clear authorial voice and inhibiting a single preferred reading. In the absence of a strong 'plot', this works to deflect attention towards reflection and extratextual discourse. Attention is to some extent maintained by the many petty aggravations encountered by the characters, but for the most part it is contemplation of the characters themselves that supplies the chief interest. As Ian Goode notes of *Big Brother*, it is 'proximity to, and observation of, behaviour and character – previously the domain of soap opera – that drives the performative formats of reality television'.[13]

13 Ian Goode, 'Value and television aesthetics', *Screen*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2003), p. 108.

Private lives, public discourse

The indirect acknowledgement of heterogeneity and the resistance to single subjectivity do not, nevertheless, imply the absence of a dominant ideology. In some respects, *Wife Swap* is dedicated to 'working through' the ramifications of certain ideological shifts that Anthony Giddens has identified in the context of an emergent ideal of 'the pure relationship'. This is an essentially egalitarian social relation 'entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another'.[14] It marks the generic restructuring of intimacy as being newly defined by rights and obligations, a process that closely parallels political democracy. In fact, Giddens develops an analogy between the two at some length, identifying key common criteria of political democracy (criteria linked by a notion of autonomy) in the ideology of personal life. Crucially, in this instance, it is rights and obligations that define intimacy: 'Intimacy should not be understood as an interactional description, but as a cluster of prerogatives and responsibilities that define agendas of practical activity'.[15] Democratization in the public sphere 'supplies essential conditions for the democratising of personal relationships' and rights, in particular, derive force from their legislative social codification. One result of all this, he argues, is a newly emergent 'life politics' that 'is concerned, not to "politicise" in a narrow sense of that term, life-style decisions but to remoralise them – more accurately put, to bring to the surface those moral and existential issues pushed away from everyday life by the sequestration of experience'.[16]

14 Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 58.

15 Ibid., p. 190.

16 Ibid., p. 197.

Arguably, *Wife Swap* is not simply a textual observation of the negotiation process in which others are engaged, but a corollary of this process of 'democratization' itself. The latter is, after all, structured by public codes and depends upon public concepts such as accountability. Similarly, the politicization and remoralization of key lifestyle decisions (about, say, child care, the completion of domestic chores,

and so on) implies, if not encodes, a right of public scrutiny. Giddens interprets accountability as a self-reflexive criterion, but it depends entirely on the ability to appeal to ethical principles (and in extreme cases, legislative intervention) that lie beyond the boundaries of the relationship itself. In this context, there is nothing remarkably intrusive about the emergence of a textual practice designed to scrutinize a relationship and/or about the viewer judgements that its mode of address invites. The text incorporates a tacit invitation for the audience to judge, not what is necessarily best for the participants, but the degree to which their relationship measures up to a societal ideal, and *ergo* it presumes society's right to know.

In *Wife Swap* an opposition between 'normality' and 'difference' (or deviance) is constructed by the inclusion of extreme characters, among the most notable of which is the racist Jackson family in the very first episode. A similar function is served in the episode under discussion by Graham, the emblematic chauvinist who, when required under Ann's new regime to clean the bathroom, comments: 'I can't understand any man who enjoys doing all this. It's piddling around to me.' Again the selection of this remark is a clear invitation to discourse, begging the response, 'why should any *woman* enjoy it?', but it is clearly a discourse that is being circumscribed by the presented opposition. Both David Jackson and Graham represent positions that are popularly and politically outmoded and reactionary so they confine the debate to a battle that is always already 'won', at least in principle (although clearly not always in practice). By framing the debate within a normal/deviant axis rather than a progressive/conservative one, the inclusion of such extreme characterizations refigures the entire gender politics debate within conservative parameters. Whereas the multiplicity of shifting subject positions and the opportunities for misfiring effectively work to problematize easy judgements about the other characters, the isolated cases of deviance actually provide a form of reassurance, inviting a display of social consensus about their views, if little else. Other than this, the very idea that there might be a homogeneous concept of normality and any single form for the ideal relationship is insistently undercut, in spite – or perhaps because – of the manner in which the text collapses together ethical choices (the division of roles, childcare) with matters of taste and consumer preference.

Performance

> *The art of the theatre is pre-aesthetic, and not aesthetic ... for the simple reason that transformation, which is after all the essence of all theatrical art, is more primitive and more easily attainable than formation, which is the essence of aesthetic arts.*[17]

It has long been recognized that narrative pleasures are crucial to even traditional documentary,[18] and the very term 'docusoap' alludes to the manner in which these shows are cast, edited and narrativized. In both fictive range and intent, *Wife Swap* supersedes both forms. Yet of all

17 Nikolas Evreinoff, *The Theatre In Life*, cited in Marvin Carlson, *Performance: a Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 35.

18 See John Corner, 'Television, documentary and the category of the aesthetic', *Screen* vol. 44, no. 1 (2003), p. 99.

the narrative dramatic techniques demonstrated in the above commentary, only one signifies a major qualitative shift away from a (nominally) documentary tradition. This, of course, is the initial conception of the situational premiss, the design of the profilmic event itself, an intervention that Kilborn discusses under the broader operations of 'reality formatting'.[19] Although *Wife Swap* is not the first show to exercise such a creative liberty, it is – like Channel 4's other remarkable success *Faking It* (2001–) – unusual in that it does so outside of a competition or gameshow format. The *raison d'être* of both series is not winning, but transformation by means of a performative process. Although both share some similarities with docusoaps, and the very act of filming (any filming) establishes a 'play frame' in Goffman's coinage, *Wife Swap*'s assembly of a potentially explosive cast within a staged space and situation, is essentially and not merely conventionally dramatic.

19 Kilborn, *Staging the Real*, p. 156.

The scenario also gives rise to a type of performance that has been critically underestimated in its scope, and it is interesting to note that the nature of the performance given by the spouses conforms to all three of Carlson's 'clusters of usage' of the term.[20] These participants are *playing a social role* (and doing so in an exceptionally self-conscious way), they are *performing an activity that may be measured against a standard* (the ideal relationship), and they are providing a *public display of technical skill* (both literally in the case of their familial tasks, and less obviously in exhibiting their skills as television personalities). Of course, we can only speculate about anyone's underlying psychological motives for participating in a reality show, for it is likely that they are themselves unsure.[21] However, in this context at least, there is most certainly a conscious desire to present, explain and justify themselves through a display of action to the camera and, by implication, to the viewer. This conforms to Burke's notion of 'dramatism', by which he means a conscious production of a certain type of behaviour that is directed at an audience. This emphasis on the intentions of the individual performer is useful, because it highlights the communicative function of performance. So although we must recognize that programme-makers actively seek out 'an ability to project an aura of real-life ordinariness coupled with an ability to accomplish a series of tasks with some measure of aplomb'[22] – or as Ian Parker once put it, 'the real person who can not rustle up a heightened TV persona is asked to step aside'[23] – the distinctions between real/contrived and amateur/professional are possibly less important than the nature of the performative/communicative relationship between participant and camera. In the case of *Wife Swap*, at least, this finds its closest parallel in the relationship between *actor* (rather than entertainer) and audience. The analogy is most acute, ironically, with so-called postmodernist performance art that eschews characterization in favour of self-expression, as well as in 1970s laboratory improvizations in which performers experimented with the literal 'living out' of devised situations. Pathologizing the participants

20 Carlson, *Performance*, p. 5.

21 When asked this question, Diane responded that 'we thought it would be a bit of a laugh'. Ann claimed (during her webchat) to have been 'inquisitive about how other people run their homes', and on another occasion, that it offered 'a little bit of excitement'. *The Observer*, 26 January 2003, p. 14.

22 Kilborn, *Staging the Real*, p. 13.

23 *The Observer*, 26 July 1998, Review section, p. 11.

and their motives tends to obscure the value of the creative interface that arises between them and their audience. For example, according to John Gray:

> The people who take part in reality TV do so because they find it more meaningful than their actual lives. In this, they are only responding to the logic of the time, which dictates that individual experience has no substance until it is rendered into the universally accessible stuff of the media. Without the validation that comes from being under continuous observation, their lives are illegible to them.[24]

24 John Gray, 'Icons of evil', *New Statesman*, 2 February 2004, p. 39.

Yet this particular strain of cultural pessimism ignores the manner in which – as noted earlier apropos Diane – the presentation of self can also be an act of witness. It bespeaks the first-person experience of a performative and essentially devised situation to a common collective (in this case, a lifestyle class). It is a performance of an *identity* constructed for and in a very specific situation, and only rarely is it an intimate revelation of private 'self' or a deliberate attempt at a crowd-pleasing 'turn'.

The movement towards increasing (and increasingly *designed*) performativity is also aptly demonstrated by *Bedsitcom* (Channel 4, 2003), a self-conscious fiction/reality hybrid that included actors alongside real people in its assemblage.[25] The personae, narrative function and sometimes dialogue of these professional 'infiltrators' were dictated by a team of writers, also often visible on screen, so implicating the viewer 'in the joke'. Although in some respects this is a natural progression from what Lambert himself (somewhat tautologically) dubbed 'manipulated documentary', the pleasure being proposed here is fundamentally different. *Bedsitcom* offers a spectacle of narrative ingenuity (how are the three unwitting participants to be coerced into taking their pre-ordained roles?) rather than narrative unpredictability, for it deliberately circumscribes the most volatile of outcomes.

25 Broadcast weekdays from 8 December 2003. Low ratings (barely a 6% share) prompted the show to be pulled off air long before completion of its eight-week run.

Nevertheless, the discomfort engendered by the latter series' knowing manipulation in some respects parallels that which provoked such fury in the case of *Wife Swap*. Critics of both were not so much lamenting television's intrusion into a private sphere, as articulating a concern with the ethics of power and control within a production. The degree of manipulation and innocence of the parties was clearly a key anxiety for commentators. As James Walton observed of the first episode:

> Even in these desensitised times, *Wife Swap* feels like an abuse of reality TV's God-like powers.... *Wife Swap*, of course, didn't pause for a second to consider any damage it might have caused. After all, its job was now done. It had successfully extracted an hour's telly from these people and the time had come to move on.[26]

26 *Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 2003.

Previous commentaries on reality TV (including a *Panorama* special entitled *Life on TV* (BBC1, 2000) had argued a similar case, parading case studies of reality TV 'celebrities' baffled and angered by the engineering effects of postproduction, and by their own lack of control over the presentation of their preferred image. Consequently a Broadcasting Standards Commission report produced in July 2003 suggested that audience awareness of these dangers was growing:

> Although viewers question the realism of reality TV ... its overall appeal is the sensationalist content which viewers recognise can be heightened by the use of selective editing.[27]

Yet these are clearly not anxieties that are ever expressed by, or on behalf of, professional performers (who also have no control over the final product), and are rarely even extended to contestants on talent/reality hybrids such as *Pop Idol* or *Fame Academy*, for whom the aspiration is to be a professional. Perhaps the most significant change from the first to the second series is an increased emphasis on the potential and actual positive nature of the intervention in these participants' lives. The follow-up specials make a pre-emptive strike at critics by re-interviewing the participants of the first and second series, many of whom seem to echo David Jackson's comment that the programme 'showed our errors of us ways'.[28] It is of course a marketing conceit of television to claim, as Kilborn puts it, that 'reality has in some way been heightened or "brightened up" as a result of television intervening'.[29] However, the columnist David Aaronovitch has ascribed this transformative power to the audience as well, arguing that the series is essentially subversive as 'It constantly reminds you of that most easily forgotten thing of all; the possibility of something else'. Such a lofty accomplishment even prompted him to draw parallels with dramatic alumni such as Dennis Potter and Pier Paolo Pasolini, not least because *Wife Swap* can, he insists, 'change our notions of who we are'.[30] Yet other commentators have remained tortured by the liberal contradictions of deriving pleasure from others' intimate discomfort, perhaps because they are grounded in the particular ethics of *documentary* spectatorship. After all, peering into someone's hospital bed is still a breach of social protocol, watching *Casualty* is not. That it should be this particular boundary that has been blurred is quite evident from the number of reviewers who adopted and repeated the 'car crash TV' metaphor in describing *Wife Swap*[31] and those who have cited reality TV as a foretaste of a dystopian culture in which acts of bestiality and paedophilia may be broadcast from offshore.[32]

So analogies with drama are still troubling, not least because, as Carlson also points out, commonsense notions of performance still tend to presume it is a 'trained' demonstration. Thus it is the amateur status of the *Wife Swap* participants that presents the only remnant of nonfiction's historic claim to represent, rather than reference, reality. This last vestige of a truth claim might also explain how it is that *Wife Swap* has managed to successfully engage in the sort of topical territory

27 BSC report, 'Dramatic licence: fact or fiction'. URL: http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/bsc/plain/pubs.htm [1 October 2004].

28 Interviewed in *Wife Swap Changed Our Marriage*, Channel 4, tx 30 September 2003.

29 Kilborn, *Staging the Real*, p. 156.

30 David Aaronovitch, 'Why we love *Wife Swap*', *The Observer*, 5 October 2003, p. 23.

31 Notably Joe Joseph in *The Times* and Thomas Sutcliffe in *The Independent*, both 8 January 2003. The metaphor actually seems to have been already in circulation.

32 Professor Stuart Fischoff (California State University) interviewed on *Life on TV* (BBC1, 2000).

(the banal stuff of everyday life) that would make highly unlikely content for a television drama serial. It is after all inconceivable that a treatment for a four-part episodic drama, one that took seriously the everyday domestic conflicts of two nuclear families, would ever make it further than a commissioning executive's wastepaper bin. Yet there is no inherent reason, given the lineage of the naturalistic project, for not tackling these issues in a wholly fictional form. Indeed, one could hypothesize that the appeal of *Wife Swap* rests precisely in its radical development of a territory that television drama abandoned along with the studio play, and the subsequent inflation in series budgets. One might speculate that its evident lack of 'onscreen spend' is actually part of its aesthetic appeal, the lack of gloss and 'quality' signifiers implying that something far more rare and raw has been recorded. It provides an illusion of ultra-intimacy in an age when television drama has – stylistically at least – moved closer and closer to cinematic film.

Even in its evidently pre-digested, narrativized form, *Wife Swap* retains a sense of danger, a promise that something unpredictable and candid, if not quite 'real', might slip through the cracks of these unprofessional, unscripted performances. In this respect, it is precisely the performers' lack of control that is so exciting, so enigmatic. There is a particularly memorable sequence at the end of one episode (in series two), when the two couples meet to discuss the experiment. Nicola confronts her real husband Jason with the ultimatum that she will not return to him unless he becomes more involved in childcare and collective family activities. Prosaic as it sounds, the scene is charged with emotion and danger. There is a very pressing sense that none of the parties, including Lambert, could have foreseen or engineered what would be said next. The performativity of the text again underlines the possibility of 'misfiring', both at the discursive point of articulation and that of reception.

Ethically this poses questions for all texts as to the individual degree and purpose to which such volatile material is exploited. A more aesthetic concern might be whether its very inclusion extends a long-stagnant naturalistic project, and whether this represents a realist renaissance. Might it even be said that these programmes represent a rupture with conventional television drama that is comparable to the rupture with classical doctrines of, say, Balzac and Stendhal, who for the first time, as Auerbach points out, took the random individual and his/her daily life and made it the subject of 'serious, problematic and even tragic representation'?[33] Or does the proliferation of banality TV instead provide the next 'anti-aesthetic' stage that Jameson predicted would follow the realism/modernism/postmodernism sequence? Such a stage, he suggests, might herald a return to the 'denotive' or 'literal' language often associated with documentary 'from which the illusions of the aesthetic have been expunged, so that the vocation of the epistemological or of knowledge cannot be exercised in some pure and unmediated form'.[34]

33 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 554.

34 Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 161.

There are of course other theoretical and sociological ways to account for the series' popularity – the emergent Spectacle and Performance Paradigm, for example, with its emphasis on the twin phenomena of spectacle and narcissism.[35] Yet the danger here is one of pathologizing the audience in much the same way as those who would lament our collective debasement, and obviating the creativity of the programme's design and execution. If, as I have argued, the viewing pleasures this series proposes are indeed akin to those of drama, there is here an argument for continuity with the past. Not so much an infiltration of 'real life' by drama and performance,[36] but a desire *to dramatize*, to actively compose and engage in sense-making narratives about the 'real lives' of ourselves and others, and to apply narrative moral logic to an artificially sequestered and unaccountable private space.

Ricoeur once rather neatly described life as 'a story in search of a narrator', by which he alluded not merely to 'a projection' of stories onto life, but to 'an authentic demand for a story' in our pre-narrative experience. Practical and moral wisdom (or 'phronetic intelligence' as he terms it) has its closest parallel in narrative logic, meaning ultimately that a life examined is a life narrated, and narrative fiction is 'an irreducible dimension of the understanding of the self".[37] This is perhaps to say no more (and no less) than Lambert himself, who hit back at his critics with a charge of hypocrisy' and claimed that *Wife Swap* 'mattered' to people quite simply because it addressed 'the issues ... we all care about – the complicated decisions we make about our lives'.[38]

35 For a comprehensive and syncretic account of this, see Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences* (London: Sage 1998).

36 A proposition originally developed in Raymond Williams, 'Drama in a dramatised society', and subsequently taken further by Baz Kershaw in his inaugural lecture 'Dramas of the performative society', published in *New Theatre Quarterly*, no. 67, vol. 17 (2001), pp. 3–11.

37 Paul Ricoeur, 'Life: a story in search of a narrator', reprinted in Marios Valdés (ed.), *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 435.

38 Quoted in *The Observer*, 26 January 2003, p. 14.

Audiophilia: audiovisual pleasure and narrative cinema in *Jackie Brown*

ROBERT MIKLITSCH

If it is true that the audio register, at least since the advent of the sound film, is a crucial aspect of cinematic pleasure or what Michel Chion calls 'audio-vision',[1] what can 'audiophilia' add to our understanding of cinephilia and scopophilia?

In this essay I will first address the issue of race in the context of what one might call cine-scopo-audiophilia, and will then turn to Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* (1997) in order to demonstrate how audiophilia is a manifest, constitutive aspect of the film's 'musical imaginary'.[2] My close reading of Tarantino's film will also endeavour to show how what I call the 'acoustic signifier' – in the form of, in particular, non-diegetic as opposed to diegetic music – not only provides a pointed perspective on the agency or perceived mastery of the various main characters but reflects the dynamic relation that obtains between the look and the gaze or between, in the sonic register, 'listening' and 'being audited'.[3]

From scopophilia to audiophilia: the gaze *qua* race

Although it is nearly thirty years since 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' appeared in *Screen* in 1975, Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay still exerts an enormous influence, like some buried radioactive deposit, on discussions of cinematic pleasure.[4] While Meaghan Morris, in the context of a moving discussion of Claire Johnston, has commented on the *esprit de corps* that informed so much of 1970s

1 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994).

2 By 'musical imaginary' I mean the whole gamut of social and affective effects associated with 'sound cinema', which is itself the product of a particular, historically specific technology and mode of representation. The term 'imaginary' has in the context of this essay a relatively neutral status, as does the related notion of fantasy.

3 My sense of the 'acoustic signifier' derives from Metz's notion of the cinema as elaborated in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982). More specifically, the term 'acoustic signifier' is intended to suggest that sound can, depending on its function (fidelity, intelligibility, expressivity) refer to a signified (say, a diegetic image) and/or another signifier (say, another 'acoustic signifier', so that the soundtrack can be said to exist apart from the diegesis or image track). This, the ambiguity or undecidability of the 'acoustic signifier' is partly what gives it its extraordinary 'plasticity'.

4 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18.

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British feminist film theory,[5] it seems to me that the limits of Mulvey's essay on visual pleasure also need to be reiterated. For example, the Mulveyan account of scopophilia is not without its own lacuna, a blind spot that has retained a striking persistence in this highly popular critical discourse.

I am referring of course to the racial gaze, a problematic that first appears within the purview of post-Freudian psychoanalysis in Homi Bhabha's 1983 Fanonesque essay, 'The Other question', and slightly later – within the domain of cinema studies proper – in the influential 1988 *Screen* issue titled, not without a little irony, 'The Last Special Issue on Race'.[6] More recently, in Robert Stam and Toby Miller's anthology, *Film and Theory*, the section devoted to 'The nature of the gaze' comprises – in addition to Mulvey – hooks's 'Oppositional gaze' and Slavoj Žižek's 'Looking awry', which represent diametrically opposed takes on the still vexed issue of the gaze.

To wit, where hooks's piece castigates black female spectators who accede to the 'pleasure of mainstream cinema' and, in the process, are summarily 'gaslighted', Žižek's essay skips from pornography to nostalgia to montage to, finally, the death drive, in order to elucidate the 'logic of the gaze *qua* object'.[7] More simply, where hooks argues that black female spectators 'enchanted' by Hollywood are thoroughly complicit with a 'masochistic look of victimization' (including her own sister before she was disabused of her regressive behaviour by hooks herself), Žižek maintains that there is an 'irreducible discord' between the gaze *qua* object and the spectatorial look.[8]

The difference between hooks's and Žižek's views of visual pleasure can be gauged, with a slight authorial displacement, by comparing two representative takes on one of the most influential and controversial films of the 1990s, Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994):

> [Tarantino] represents the ultimate in 'white cool': a hard-core cynical *vision* that would have *everyone see* racism, sexism and homophobia but behave as though none of that shit really matters, or if it does it means nothing 'cause none of it's gonna change, 'cause the real deal is that 'domination is here to stay'.[9]

> We may not like [Tarantino's films]; these may not be the films we want. But, then, films are rarely about what we want ... the symptoms that [Tarantino's films] display signal certain shifts in the terrain of racialized representation. And this bears watching, since *it* is watching us.[10]

For hooks, Tarantino's 'pornographic', politically-regressive representation of 'white cool' and its ugly predicates (racism, sexism, and so on) is part and parcel of a nihilistic vision that produces a blinding disjunction between looking and doing: 'everyone' can 'see' as clear as day what's up on the screen, but no one will 'behave' any differently because he/she knows what the 'real' raw deal is (that is, 'domination is here to stay'). For Sharon Willis, by contrast,

5 Meaghan Morris, *Too Soon, Too Late: History in Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. xiii–xxiii.

6 Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Other question: the stereotype and colonial discourse', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6 (1983), pp. 18–36; 'The Last Special Issue on Race', *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1988).

7 bell hooks, 'Oppositional gaze', and Slavoj Žižek, 'Looking awry', in Robert Stam and Toby Miller (eds), *Film and Theory* (New York, NY: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 529, 514.

8 Ibid., pp. 515, 529.

9 My emphasis. hooks, 'Cool cynicism: *Pulp Fiction*', in *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), pp. 46–7.

10 My emphasis. Sharon Willis, 'Borrowed "style": Quentin Tarantino's figures of masculinity', in *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 216.

Tarantino's films are not about the politics of representation, about what we think we like or want, but they nonetheless bear watching, even *re*viewing (and this, I think, is a rather different project than hooks envisions), because such films continually 'catch us out', exposing us to the performative contradiction between the look and the gaze, between what we claim we want to see and 'what we do not want to own'.[11]

In addition to articulating what is at stake in the 'noncoincidence of the look and the gaze', Willis's observation about the 'stunning asymmetry' between Tarantino's equations of popular music and 'icons of black masculinity' provides a useful point of departure for thinking about audiophilia, if not filmic sound in general.[12] Indeed, I want to suggest that there is an equally stunning asymmetry in *Jackie Brown* between the eponymous character, an icon of black *femininity* (Pam Grier), and the music used to articulate her 'point of view' ('funky seventies soul').[13] In other words, not unlike Žižek's analysis of the discord between eye and gaze, there is a subtle discontinuity in Tarantino's film between diegetic and non-diegetic music where, consonant with the logics associated with visual economies, diegetic or, more properly, 'subjective' diegetic music is a form of hearing or listening aligned with the look while *non*-diegetic music – in this case, popular-musical songs as opposed to instrumental music – is aligned with the gaze and audition.[14]

Audiophilia: auditing Jackie Brown

The thing I'm coming from is listening to music to be the guide to a movie.
Tarantino, press conference on *Jackie Brown*

Tarantino, of course, is as famous for his audiophilia as his cinephilia. Even as his cinephilia bespeaks an adolescence 'spent in black movie theatres watching ... blaxploitation flicks',[15] his well-recorded 'crush' on Pam Grier (whom he talks about as someone else might talk about Garbo or Dietrich) bespeaks a serious scopophilic investment in her 'figure'. As Clarence (Christian Slater) says about Alabama (Patricia Arquette) in *True Romance* (Ridley Scott, 1993), 'She's a sixteen-calibre kitten! ... Alabama Whitman is Pam Grier!' Or, as the authors of *The Tarantinian Ethics* describe the opening of *Jackie Brown*, 'This is true romance, the love affair of lens and image.... The director's enamouration with this rediscovered icon of the seventies is translated into the unflinching absorption of cinematic homage, a fantasy as full as the figure who fills the screen.'[16]

Tarantino's audiophilia is also abundantly on display early on in *Jackie Brown* when the non-diegetic music that accompanies Jackie's brief imprisonment is 'Long Time Woman' ('I'm a long time woman / And I'm serving my time'), recorded by Pam Grier herself for the Roger Corman-produced 'women in prison' classic, *The Big Doll*

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., p. 217. For a reading that focuses more on other elements of the soundtrack such as, inter alia, 'effects', see my 'Real fantasies: Connie Stevens, *Silencio*, and other sonic phenomena in *Mulholland Drive*', in Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (eds), *Lowering the Boom* (forthcoming).

13 Quentin Tarantino, *Jackie Brown: a Screenplay* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 1997), p. 1. All further references to the published version of the screenplay will be cited in parentheses in the text. For the soundtrack, listen to *Jackie Brown: Music From the Motion Picture* (A Band Apart/Maverick, 1997). The 'popular-musical imaginary' of *Jackie Brown* is mainly a function of 1970s music. However, the 'musical imaginary' of *Jackie Brown* also encompasses historically heterogeneous music such as the Supremes mid-1960s hit 'Baby Love' and Johnny Cash's 1990s alt-folk/country rendition of 'Tennessee Stud'.

14 I am playing here on the French terms *le regard* (which can be translated as either the 'look' or the 'gaze') and its 'aural equivalent', *l'écoute*. Chion, *Audio-Vision*, p. 216, fn. 1.

15 Tarantino, 'Interview with Quentin Tarantino' (1994), interview conducted by Joshua Mooney, in Gerald Peary (ed.), *Quentin Tarantino: Interviews* (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 1998), p. 77.

16 Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, *The Tarantinian Ethics* (London: Sage, 2001), p. 165.

House (Jack Hill, 1971). Moreover, in a striking scene near the beginning of *Jackie Brown*, Jackie – while entertaining Max Cherry (Robert Forster) the morning after she has been released from the county jail – mirrors Tarantino's own self-professed status as an audiophile:

> Max: You never got into the CD revolution?
> Jackie: I got a few. But I can't afford to start all over. I just got too much time and money invested in my records. (p. 86)

Needless to say, neither Jackie's audiophilia nor her choice of music (the Delfonics' 'Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time') is incidental,[17] since if her audiophilia offers a subtle commentary on her stubborn attachment to the past, the Delfonics song marks the exact moment in *Jackie Brown* when Max goes from initial attraction to full-blown romantic infatuation. (In fact, if only to anticipate what I will take up later in more detail, Tarantino accents Max's romanticism by cutting from Louis Gara [Robert De Niro] having sex with Melanie Ralston [Bridget Fonda] to Max shopping in a music store for *The Best of The Delfonics*.[18])

While a certain classic star-driven scopic pleasure is clearly at play in Tarantino's infatuation with Pam Grier ('I've just been a big fan for a long time. She is a truly great icon'),[19] his ardent audiophilia equally clearly fuels both his cinephilia and his 'postmodern' style of filmmaking. Thus, in a press conference for *Jackie Brown*, Tarantino remarked that he originally conceived of the film less as an 'opera', like *Pulp Fiction*, than as a 'chamber piece', where – to mix musical genres, if not metaphors – the beat or rhythm of *Jackie Brown* is 'old romantic soul-music from the seventies' (p. 86).[20] This sonic determination is, I think, crucial because unlike a lot of directors (or, at least, *pre*-MTV directors), Tarantino's musical sense or taste tends to dictate his cinematic choices rather than vice versa. As he essayed in a discussion about the Dick Dale 'overture' to *Pulp Fiction*: 'I'm always trying to find the right opening credit or closing credit sequence music early on, when I'm thinking about the story. Once I find it, that really triggers me into the personality ... of what the piece should be'.[21]

'Across 110th Street': overture

> *[Jackie's] just walking down the airport and she just looks like the baddest creature.*
> Tarantino interview, *Guardian*.

If Tarantino is taken at his word here (and I think he can and should be), the music-induced mood of the opening credit sequence of *Jackie Brown* – provided by Bobby Womack's 'Across 110th Street' – is wonderfully expressive, recollecting as it does *Across 110th Street* (Barry Shear, 1972), a film that is contemporaneous with *Shaft* (Gordon

17 Jackie's 'musical point of view' is also audible in scenes in which Max listens to the Delfonics while driving to and from the Del Amo Mall. For an instructive reading of the scene where Jackie *selects* the Delfonics to play for Max, see Ken Garner, 'Would you like to hear some music: in-and-out-of-control in the films of Quentin Tarantino', in Kevin Donnelly (ed.), *Film Music: Critical Approaches* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2001), p. 160.

18 The Delfonics, who recorded for Stan 'The Man' Watson's Philly Groove Records, drew on, among other things, the doo-wop sound of Frankie Lymon and Little Anthony and the Imperials to produce 1960s and 1970s hits such as 'La-La Means I Love You' and 'Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time'.

19 Tarantino, 'Press conference on *Jackie Brown*' (1997), transcribed by Peter Keough, in Peary (ed.), *Quentin Tarantino*, p. 199.

20 Ibid., p. 195.

21 See the entry on 'Music', in Alan Barnes and Marcus Hearn, *Tarantino, A to Zed: the Films of Quentin Tarantino* (London: Batsford, 1996), p. 102.

Parks, 1971) and for which Womack wrote the title song and score. '110th Street' also invokes that larger cinematic 'structure of feeling', blaxploitation, which remains the audiovisual source for the character of Jackie Brown and her inimitable predecessor, Foxy Brown.[22]

A close 'look' at the very beginning of *Jackie Brown* confirms the significance of Womack's song, the opening notes of which precede the pre-title sequence, as if true to Tarantino's audiophilic mode of working, the film itself were generated out of this aural space. 'Across 110th Street' commences, followed by the titles 'Miramax Films' and 'A Band Apart' (the latter a cheeky reference to Godard), then – simultaneous with the director's 'signature', 'A Film by Quentin Tarantino' – Jackie Brown steps into the frame. This part of the sequence – a continuous medium-shot that follows Jackie on a moving walkway as she traverses the lobby to the gate at Cabo Air Lines – speaks volumes about her current station in life. Her long hair pulled back, smartly dressed in her Cabo Air Lines uniform, a flight bag slung over one shoulder, a scarf tied loosely around her neck, Jackie Brown may be running, literally, a little late, but she is calm, cool, and collected – in a word, professional. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson re-stage Tarantino's scopophilic 'gaze': 'Jackie Brown *looks* fantastic: her walk, between strut and swagger, her *look*, exudes an absolute self-assurance and self-possession, a fullness correlated with the way in which SHE fills the screen'.[23]

The million, or in this case half-million, dollar question is: where, literally and figuratively, is she going?

We later learn from an LAPD officer, Mark Dargus (Michael Bowen), that Jackie has previously run foul of the law. In 1985 she was 'busted for carrying drugs' for her pilot husband ('He did time and [Jackie] did probation'), an incident that explains why, at age forty-four, she is still working for what Dargus calls the 'shittiest little shuttle fucking piece of shit Mexican airline that there is'. If this weren't bad enough ('the worse job in the industry', as Jackie tells Max over coffee), she has been slaving away in the airline business for nineteen years and her salary is 'only sixteen thousand [dollars] plus benefits'. Dargus says sarcastically to Jackie: 'Didn't exactly set the world on fire, did ya?'

Dispiriting as this narrative is, the opening lyrics of 'Across 110th Street' tell a slightly different story, evoking not only where 'Jacqueline' Brown comes from but what she wants:

> I was the third brother of five
> Doing whatever I had to do to survive
> I'm not saying what I did was alright
> Trying to break out of the ghetto was a day to day fight
>
> Been down so long, getting up didn't cross my mind
> I knew there was a better way of life that I was just trying to find
> You don't know what you'll do until you're put under pressure
> Across 110th Street is a hell of a tester[24]

22 Bonnie Dimmich (Vanessa Valentino) in *Pulp Fiction* – Jimmy's bad-ass black wife who in turn appears to be modelled on Pam Grier in *Coffy* – and Alabama Whitman in *True Romance* are the precursors in Tarantino's own, densely intertextual corpus. For Tarantino's conception of blaxploitation, see 'Blaxploitation: what it is ... what it was!', in Paul A. Woods (ed.), *The Film Geek Files* (London: Plexus, 2000), pp. 138–43.

23 Botting and Wilson, *Tarantinian Ethics*, p. 165.

24 Bobby Womack, 'Across 110th Street' (1972).

The counterpoint at work in these lyrics suggests that although Jackie is not a 'brother', she'll do whatever she has to do – whether it's 'alright' or not – to survive, to break out of the ghetto-like circumstances she's found herself in. What Chion calls 'empathetic' music has, therefore, an extra resonance in this sequence given Jackie's complex subject-position (which is a function of age, race and gender).[25]

At the same time, the non-diegetic 'character' of the music as opposed to the lyrics also intimates that for all her 'strut and swagger', Jackie's agency is subject to real limits, so much so that sound can be said to trump image (since it is arguably the music, not Jackie's 'look', which [over]'fills the screen'). More precisely and dialectically, Jackie may be a figure of fantasy, the very stuff of cinephilia and scopophilia, but this fantasy – like the screen just before she pulls a gun on Ordell Robbie (Samuel Jackson) – is split.[26] Thus, if the tracking shot of Jackie immobile on the moving walkway, à la Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) at the beginning of *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), accentuates her imprisonment (in her current job as well as in her relation with both the law and Ordell), 'Across 110th Street' – true to the dialectical modality of the 'acoustic signifier' – simultaneously gives voice to Jackie's desperation and her desire for freedom: in sum, she moves not simply to, but with, the music.

25 'Empathetic sound', for Chion, is music that 'directly express[es] its participation in the feelings of the scene, by taking on the scene's rhythm, tone, and phrasing'. Chion, *Audio-Vision*, p. 8.

26 In fact, this ambiguity or plasticity is implicit in the whole notion of non-diegetic sound, where the latter is predicated on the diegesis understood in its most reductive form not so much as narrative but image. The acoustic signifier's undecidability is also what accounts for the ambiguous status of (non-) diegetic sound in general, as well as in particular 'acousmatic' offscreen sound.

'Street life': Jackie-as-femme (noire) fatale

Pam Grier wasn't the black version of anybody.
Tarantino, press conference on *Jackie Brown*.

Let us cut to the heart of the film where Jackie is on her way to the Del Amo Mall for the big 'half-a-million dollar switcharoo'. The sequence begins with a front-window shot— a closeup in three-quarters profile – of Jackie driving in her Honda Civic as Randy Crawford and the Crusaders's 'Street Life' plays on the soundtrack:

I play the street life
Because there's no place I can go
Street life
It's the only life I know
Street life
And there's a thousand parts to play
Street life
Until you play your life away

You never [let] people see
Just who you wanna be
And every night you shine
Just like a superstar[27]

27 Randy Crawford and the Crusaders, 'Street Life' (w. Joe Sample and Will Jennings, 1979).

Although Crawford's song eloquently captures Jackie's mindset at this particular moment (she's about to gamble everything she has on her

ability to pull the wool over the law's and Ordell's eyes), this sequence also includes a brief cutaway shot of Max – seen in medium-shot through the front window of his Cadillac Seville – cruising down Hawthorne Boulevard on his way to the mall. The fact that 'Street Life', rather than, as in the screenplay, the Delfonics, plays under this shot indicates that even though the music is not enunciated by Jackie, her musical 'point of view' is dominant.[28]

After a brief cut back to Jackie driving in her car ('The type of life that's played / A tempting masquerade'), the camera cuts to Louis and Melanie en route to the same mall in a Volkswagen bus. The acoustic difference between these three scenes is telling: while Max is obviously lost in a romantic reverie about Jackie (one, the soundtrack hints, Jackie does not fully share), Louis and Melanie are squabbling about the car stereo's volume, Melanie blithely drumming her thigh to the Grass Roots's 'Midnight Confessions'. More to the point, if the cutaway to Max illustrates the contrast between his romanticism and Jackie's street smarts as well as the intimate but occluded relation between the two (since Max cannot see that Jackie's attraction to him is a 'masquerade' of sorts), the cutaway to Louis and Melanie emphasizes the difference between the two couples: Jackie, who has fully registered Max's look of love, knows she has him right where she wants him, whereas Louis, unlike Ordell, cannot control Melanie, an issue that will have disastrous consequences for both of them.

After arriving at the Del Amo Mall parking lot, Jackie gets out of her car, opens the hatchback and, using some pulp romance novels, arranges the $50,000 which Ray Nicolet (Michael Keaton) has marked – minus ten grand, a 'little cherry on top', for Melanie. (As Jackie later says to her in the fitting room where the money exchange takes place, 'What the hell [Ordell] ever do for us?') On the soundtrack 'Street Life' scores Jackie's actions:

Street life
But you better not get old
Street life
Or you gonna feel the cold

There's always love for sale
A grown-up fairy tale
Prince Charming always smiles
Behind the silver spoon
And if you keep it young
Your song is always sung
Your love will pay your way beneath the silver moon

The aforementioned 'hatchback' shot with its tight framing would appear to contain or restrict Jackie, just as the non-diegetic music drives home the 'meanness' of a life lived on the streets.

And yet, if the accompanying lyrics record that time is beginning to run out on her, the visual echo of the one other trunk shot in the film

28 On 'musical "point of view"', see David Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo: a Film Score Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 67–8. The problem with the notion of 'musical *point of view*' – in addition to the fact that it pertains only to music and not sound in general – is, of course, its rhetorical valorization of point of view, which has the conceptual effect of *re*instituting the primacy of the visual axis. Hence my recourse to 'point of audition'. In 'subjective' point of audition, according to Chion, 'we find the same phenomenon as that which operates for vision. . . . It is the visual representation of a character in closeup that, in simultaneous association with the hearing of sound, identifies this sound as being heard by the character shown.' Chion, *Audio-Vision*, p. 91.

(where the point of view is that of the dead Beaumont) suggests that Jackie is no victim – unlike Beaumont or, for that matter, Louis, whom, significantly, Ordell shoots while his Volkswagen is parked. Indeed, the opposite is the case, since at this very moment Jackie is in the process of usurping Ordell's position of power. (This reversal is confirmed by the fact that the instrumental non-diegetic music in the 'Music Exchange' sequence as whole – 'Aragon', 'Escape' and 'Vittroni's Theme/King is Dead' – is lifted from Roy Ayers's score for the Pam-Grier vehicle, *Coffy* [Jack Hill, 1973]: 'The "Godmother" of them all ... the baddest One-Chick Hit-Squad that ever hit town!')[29]

The ensuing traveling shot of Jackie walking against a bright blue tiled background recollects the opening sequence of the film, but with a critical difference: as Jackie strides toward the mall with 'all the confidence of a world champion' (p. 175), she is not en route to her job at Cabo Air Lines but to a another kind of 'job' that will liberate her from her dead-end life. The location is crucial here: not LAX – which, with its pejorative liberatory associations ('flight'), signifies her chequered past, in particular her past subservience to her husband as well as her continuing indenture to Ordell – but the mall ('DEL AMO MALL – LARGEST INDOOR MALL IN THE WORLD') where, literally acting out her own ingenious script, she will effectively turn the tables on those who would manipulate her for their own ends: the ATF and LAPD, who are using her to get to Ordell, and Ordell himself, for whom Jackie is merely a trusted courier.

In this particular context, it is important to remember that precisely because Ordell thinks he knows Jackie like he knows Melanie ('You can't trust Melanie. But you can always trust Melanie to be Melanie'), he believes he has her under his thumb. Ordell's character's apparent sense of mastery is acoustically established in *Jackie Brown* via, among other things, what one might call 'idiosyncratic' diegetic sound:[30] the casually authoritative way he 'beeps' his car to set the alarm and locks, his keen attention to audiophilic detail (he says to Louis: 'You can play the volume loud as you want to. But don't touch my levels now. I got them set just like I like them'),[31] and, most importantly, the kinds of music this 'brother' chooses to play in his 'ride'.

In fact, just as subjective diegetic music, such as the Delfonics, is used to delineate Jackie (which is not to say that her identity is commensurate with this kind of music, since this 'romantic' guise is only one of her various personae), so 'idiosyncratic' diegetic music is used to characterize the real antagonist of *Jackie Brown*, Ordell. Consider, for example, the execution of Beaumont near the beginning of the film. Once Ordell has persuaded Beaumont to get into the boot of his car with a pump-action shotgun, the Brothers Johnson's 'Strawberry Letter', written by Shuggie Otis, booms on the soundtrack. After Ordell has taken his own sweet time putting on black gloves and getting a .38 from the glove compartment of his car, he drives around the block while, in the most audacious stylistic moment in *Jackie*

29 For a more comprehensive reading of this key sequence, see Garner, 'Would you like to hear some music', pp. 198–9. For Ayers's soundtrack, listen to *Coffy* (1973, Uptown/Univers).

30 By 'idiosyncratic' diegetic sound (which is to be distinguished from both Chion's restricted understanding of 'point of audition' and so-called 'musical point of view'), I mean music and/or sound effects that are associated with a single character or set of characters. Thus, although Louis also 'beeps' Ordell's car, this sonic act says more about Ordell than Louis (Ordell dominates Louis). In this context (and according to the above logic), one can also speak of 'objective' diegetic as well as 'subjective' and 'objective' non-diegetic sound.

31 The fact that the only music associated with Louis is the Supremes' 'Baby Love' musically connotes just how out of touch he is. Tarantino's introductory description of his character in the screenplay captures this musically obtuse aspect of his character: 'While acutely aware of the rhythm of life inside a correctional facility, in the real world [Louis's] timing is thrown. It's like a song he doesn't know the lyrics to but attempts to sing along [to] anyway' (p. 4).

Brown, the camera 'cranes' to view the action. As Ordell drives, the music fades out, then back in. We watch/listen from a discrete distance while Ordell parks, shuts the car door, then opens the boot, Beaumont's voice yammering away like a broken record. There is the sound of a gun blast, then another, then dead silence. We hear the boot door close, the door of Ordell's Oldsmobile, and, finally, on his car stereo – on 'LOW' – the deep soul funk of 'Strawberry Letter'. Life, the music suggests, goes on, business is business, potentially wayward 'employees' have to be terminated.

Diegetic music is also employed to contrast and match Ordell and Max. While the Delfonics's 'Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time' suffuses Max's car like some exotic perfume, the music that plays under Ordell's surveillance of Jackie after he has posted bond for her (and she has shared a drink with Max at the Cockatoo Inn) is Johnny Cash's 'Tennessee Stud'.[32] Indeed, as the music swells, Ordell begins his pre-execution routine. (What he does not know, or cannot envision, is that Jackie is already one step ahead and, in a proleptic visual rhyme, has surreptitiously purloined Max's gun from the glove compartment of *his* car. To 'loop' Johnny Cash: Ordell is no 'Tennessee Stud' because Jackie is no 'Tennessee Mare'.)

32 The music played at Jackie's haunt, the Cockatoo Inn, in the various scenes located there – in particular, Ayers's 'Exotic Dance' (Jackie/Max) and Minnie Ripperton's 'Inside My Love' (Jackie/Ordell) – resonate with the performative complexity of Jackie's character.

Ultimately, however, Ordell is not nearly as different from Max as he supposes. Thus, when near the end of the film Ordell drives *Max*'s car to the latter's office (where, unbeknowst to them, Jackie – backed up by Ray and Mark – awaits with Max's .38), the music that enlivens their deadly serious drive is, once again, 'Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time', the lyrics of which are all about a *man* who can't leave a woman ('Ten times or more ... I've walked out that door'.) That Ordell is subjected at this particular moment in the narrative to another person's musical point of audition (which is arguably not so much Max's as Jackie's, since she first turned him on to it) attests that both men have, in fact, been played.

'Across 110th Street': denouement

> *I don't subconsciously think [Jackie Brown] is a black film; it is a black film. [Jackie Brown] is not a black exploitation film.*
> Tarantino, interview, *Guardian*

The final sequence of *Jackie Brown* provides a rich commentary on Jackie's new status. Melanie, Louis and Ordell are all dead. Louis, in a fit of castratory rage, has shot and killed Melanie in the parking lot of the Del Amo Mall; Ordell, in turn, has shot Louis for shooting his 'fine little surfer girl'; and Ordell, whom Jackie has lured to Cherry Bail Bonds by feigning being 'spooked' by him ('All the time I never heard her sound scared like that'), has been shot and killed by Ray. Jackie, however, has one more bit of business to attend to before she departs the country: Max Cherry.

Crucially, Jackie arrives at Max's office (the front window of which sports a 'fat red cherry' [p. 13]) in *Ordell*'s car, a fact that does not escape Max's attention: 'That's Ordell's'. While Jackie's defence – 'What's the matter? Haven't you ever borrowed someone's car?' – indicates a certain cold-bloodedness on her part (one that momentarily conjures up associations with the *femme fatale* of *film noir*[33]), Max's own response to Jackie's blase attitude ('Not after they're dead') underscores his own uneasy recognition of his position in relation to her; after all, it could very easily have been him, and not Ordell, who ended up dead. Jackie, sensing Max's ambivalence, cuts to the chase:

Jackie: I didn't use you, Max.
Max: I didn't say you did.
Jackie: I never lied to you.
Max: I know.
Jackie: We're partners.
Max: I'm fifty-five years old and I can't blame anybody for anything *I* do.

Undeterred, Jackie invites Max to go with her to Madrid, but he is more than just a 'little bit' scared. Although he is a pretty cool customer in his own right, especially at the end when Ordell threatens to blow his brains out, he is ultimately no match for Jackie, who is 'cool as the breeze' (p. 200), an inspired throwaway allusion to Pam Grier's *Cool Breeze* (Barry Pollack, 1972), or, as Ordell himself says at one point, 'too cool for school'. In fact, Max's vulnerability is graphically underlined by Tarantino when, in the film's final closeup of him as he mournfully watches Jackie walk away, we see that his lips are smeared with Jackie's cherry-red lipstick. If being 'cherry' implies a certain naivete, Max is clearly not as experienced or streetwise as Jackie.

Cut to Jackie driving again, 'Across 110th Street' on the soundtrack. This, the final sequence of *Jackie Brown* visually reiterates the opening of the film with Jackie gliding past bay windows with planes in the distance, even as it musically references the 'Street Life' sequence. However, the difference between the earlier driving sequence and this one – in addition to the fact that Jackie is en route to the airport, not the mall, and is shot from the front rather than in profile (so that we can read the emotions that pass like clouds across her face) – is the precise status of the soundtrack. Although the final sequence begins with a closeup on Jackie's face as she drives (and, perhaps, reflects on her recent farewell to Max), she suddenly starts lip-synching or, depending on one's interpretation, *singing* 'Across 110th Street':

Pimps trying to catch a woman who's weak
Across 110th Street
Pushers won't let the junkie go free

33 See, for example, Foster Hirsch, 'The boys in the back room', in *Detours and Lost Highways: a Map of Neo-Noirs* (New York, NY: Limelight, 1999), pp. 138–9.

Across 110th Street
A woman trying to catch a trick on the street
Across 110th Street
You can find it all in the street

There appears to be a certain irony here insofar as Jackie is hardly 'weak', nor has she had to resort to prostitution to survive (or to exact revenge, as Foxy Brown does). Moreover, if the song is not playing in her head but on the car stereo (if, that is to say, the sound is 'source'), the moment when Jackie starts singing the above bridge from 'Across 110th Street' involves what Chion calls *de*acousmatization, since the sound changes from non-diegetic to diegetic or 'on-the-air' sound.[34]

What exactly is the import of this particular – in this case, heavily-accented – point of synchonization? About this signal audiovisual phenomenon, Chion comments in 'Phantom audio-vision' that 'deacousmatization goes hand in hand with [the] descent into a human, ordinary, and vulnerable fate'.[35] Chion's focus here is on various *acousmêtres* (for example, the unmasking of the Wizard of Oz in the film of the same name), but his interpretation of this process can also be applied, with some minor revision, to the final sequence of *Jackie Brown*:

> Why is the sight of a face necessary to deacousmatization? For one thing, because the face represents the individual in her singularity. For another, the sight of the [singing] face attests through the synchrony of audition/vision that the [song] really belongs to that character, and thus is able to capture, domesticate, and 'embody' her (and humanize as well).[36]

Jackie is no doubt humanized in the last sequence of the film (a byproduct of, among other things, the conjunction of closeup and enunciated sound), but her character is not, it seems to me, 'captured' or 'domesticated' by the soundtrack. Rather, the moment when Jackie begins to sing 'Across 110th Street' (and, in the process, reveal the source of the music) is a profoundly paradoxical one, since at this point in the diegesis, she is arguably audited *and* auditor, enunciator *and* enunciated.

Indeed, this particular 'point of audition' insinuates that even as Jackie is finally making 'Across 110th Street' her own – as it were, internalizing it – she is still subject to another or the Other's voice, not a woman's (say, Randy Crawford's) but a man's (Bobby Womack's). In other words, Jackie may have escaped Melanie's brutal fate (to which I will return below) and, certainly, Spain is worlds away from the mean streets chronicled in 'Across 110th Street'; however, no one, not even someone as cunning as Jackie (who has successfully come away intact from her encounters with both the law and Ordell – with, that is, the money *and* her life), can completely evade the 'acoustic

34 Chion: 'An inherent quality of the *acousmêtre* is that it can be instantly dispossessed of its mysterious powers (seeing all, omniscience, omnipotence, ubiquity) when it is *de*-acousmatized, when the film reveals the face, that is the source of the voice'. Chion, *Audio-Vision*, p. 130.

35 Ibid., p. 131.

36 Ibid., p. 130.

gaze'. In the final analysis, as the sonic reiteration of Womack's 'Across 110th Street' makes clear, Jackie Brown remains a black woman in – to dub James Brown—a (white) man's world.

Audiophilia reconsidered: 'asking for it'

I may come back in another form, and you know,
I'll come back as a white man.
Pam Grier.[37]

In 'Cinephilia reconsidered', Paul Willemen remarks that 'there is a multiple array of pleasures' depending on the various fantasy scenarios a film puts into play, none of which pleasures is – in itself – 'either good or bad, positive or negative'.[38] Instead, 'cinema or any other representational practice binds a variety of pleasures into narrative structures in such a way that the pleasures come to function as positive or negative indicators'.[39]

The questions I want to raise here are: if, as *audio*-spectators, we are positively invested in Jackie's victory over her male adversaries, what is the relation between her character and Melanie's? And more pointedly, what is one to make of Melanie's sudden death at the hands of Louis, a character who himself is an obvious figure of castration, subject as he is – not unlike Melanie and the other women that form Ordell's posse (Raynelle, Sheronda) – to the latter's phallic regime?

The answers to these questions, I want to submit, are not only reflected in the sorts of highly personal musical choices Tarantino makes in *Jackie Brown*, choices that define the film's 'musical imaginary'; this audiophilia is also inextricably intertwined with Tarantino's equally acute sense of cinephilia and scopophilia, cathexes that are 'driven', in turn, by 'idiosyncratic' notions of race and gender.

In a *Sight and Sound* interview contemporaneous with *Jackie Brown*, Erik Bauer observes that whereas Louis's violent act in Elmore Leonard's novel, *Rum Punch* (1992), on which the film is based, 'seems like an extension of his character', in Tarantino's film 'it comes as a shock'.[40] Although Tarantino contends that it 'gives the movie a dose of reality', Bauer not only presses the director on this point ('isn't it important for all action to be set up, so people understand why it's taking place') but wonders out loud about the 'audience's attachment to Melanie's character when she dies'.[41] Tarantino's answer, which I quote in full, is, I think, revealing for the light it sheds on his conception of Melanie's character:

> I think the audience has a complete love/hate relationship with Melanie. Audiences applaud when Louis shoots her. It's impossible that someone could be asking for it, but she's asking for it. She's a fucking smartass, treacherous and all these things. But we also like her at the same time; she's a totally fun character.[42]

37 Nathan Raban, 'Pam Grier interview', *The Onion*. URL: http://www.theonionavclub.com/feature/index.php?issue=3806&f=1

38 Paul Willemen, 'Cinephilia reconsidered,' in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 251.

39 Ibid., p. 251.

40 Erik Bauer, 'The mouth and the method', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1996), p. 9.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

Melanie's death in *Jackie Brown* recollects, of course, similar shocking moments in other Tarantino films, such as Vince Vega's (John Travolta) accidental shooting of Marvin (Phil La Marr) in *Pulp Fiction*. Indeed, the unexpected but oddly compelling juxtaposition of comedy and brutality that marks the above two scenes is a signature Tarantino effect, one that was first indelibly impressed on most viewers in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) when Mr Blonde (Michael Madsen) slices off Marvin Nash's (Kirk Baltz) ear to the sound of Stealer's Wheel's 'Stuck in the Middle with You'.[43] This is the Tarantinian universe writ small: comic-acoustic sadomasochism.

Bauer's question about 'set up' notwithstanding, Melanie's death in *Jackie Brown* is in fact set up from the very beginning of the film and goes some way towards explaining the movie's libidinal – in this case, racially and sexually inflected – economy. For example, unlike Jackie, who first appears in motion and, importantly, fully-clothed (very much in contrast, one might add, to those characters that constitute Pam Grier's iconic persona), Melanie is a classic object of the scopophilic gaze. Not only is she shot in a horizontal position, 'curled up in a reclining chair' (p. 5) in the apartment that Ordell has leased for her, silver toe rings adorning her pedicured feet, her tanned chest and legs foregrounded and fetishized as in a *Playboy* pin-up, her initial appearance in the film is linked to the video in which Ordell and Louis are wholly absorbed. While Melanie is decidedly uninterested in 'Chicks Who Love Guns', it is compulsive viewing for Ordell and Louis, Busby Berkeley for the gangsta set: 'A chorus line of six beautiful bikini-clad women, all holding different automatic weapons' (p. 37).

Still, even as the camera trains on the changing parade of phallic women on screen (the action of which, true to some blue B-noir, Ordell narrates), Melanie exists as another, alternative focus. Instead of holding an AK 47 (as Gloria, 'a tall Amazonian bikini-clad black woman' [p. 5], does), Melanie is 'smoking weed from a pipe' and perusing an issue of *Movieline* magazine (p. 5), a detail that imbues the opening shots of her with a distinct cinephilic charge: she may not be Jackie Brown, but she is a star in her own right, a beach-bum Odalisque.

Of course, even Jackie Brown is not, as it were, Jackie Brown. In *Rum Punch* she is Jackie Burke, and in Leonard's novel her race is *un*marked, which is to say she is white, not black.[44] The scopic, acoustic and cinephilic implications of this racial substitution are most apparent in a scene early in the film when Max first makes Jackie's acquaintance. Certainly Jackie, like Melanie, is the object of the gaze (Max's as well as the audience's), but as the song 'Natural High' hints ('Why do I feel this way? / Thinking about you every day / And I don't even know your name'), this gaze or, more properly, look is more romantic than sexual. Max falls hard for Jackie the very first moment he sees her emerging in long-shot out of the shadows of the county jail,

43 See the entry for 'Stuck in the Middle with You', in Barnes and Hearn, *Tarantino: A to Zed*, p. 138.

44 However, if only Jackie Burke's hair colour is marked in *Rum Punch* ('dark blond'), both Ordell's and Louis's race is explicitly registered: 'a light-skinned black guy and a dark-skinned white guy', respectively. Elmore Leonard, *Rum Punch* (New York: Delacorte, 1992), p. 3. This particular registration has an added kick given the context: a neo-Nazi, 'white power demonstration in downtown Palm Beach' (p. 1).

the dulcet tones of Bloodstone accompanying her entrance like some heavenly choir. Despite Jackie's ragged appearance, could this be the annunciation or, better yet, the transfiguration of Foxy Brown?

The scopic-cinephilic punch of this moment of pure, unadulterated romanticization is retroactively confirmed in a scene in the screenplay (cut from the movie) where Max and Jackie chat in the food court at the Del Amo Mall after he has just emerged from a matinee movie:

> Max: I think falling in love with movie stars is something that happens to a man as he gets older.
> Jackie: Does it happen to all men?
> Max: Well, I'd never be so bold as to speak for all men, but as for myself and a few of my friends, that's definitely the case. There's a lot of actresses out there you like, and there's some you have crushes on. But there's always one who you love (p. 122).

Given this matinee idol context, it is striking that Max and Jackie never consummate their relationship (as they do in Leonard's novel). In comparison, Melanie not only has casual sex with Louis but is literally fucked from behind, a sexual position that carries a potent, if ambiguous, charge in Tarantino's films (such as the scene in *Pulp Fiction* where Marsellus Wallace [Ving Rhames] is the object of anal rape by a white male). In fine, whereas Jackie is an object of idealization, ciné-Platonic idealization, and even Simone (Hattie Winston) is allowed to abscond with ten grand of Ordell's money, Melanie is an abject, sexually contaminated object that has to be *eliminated*, like so much waste.

That the difference between these two figurations of femininity is a racial one can be gleaned from the music used to articulate each character. While Jackie's musical 'point of audition' is realized, as I have illustrated, via black R&B artists such as Bobby Womack and Randy Crawford, Melanie's is associated with white pop-rock bands like the Guess Who and the Grass Roots.[45] In fact, it is not insignificant that the latter musical *points de capiton* are introduced in the scenes that immediately precede Melanie's death. I have already discussed the 'automotive' montage in which Melanie, to Louis's obvious *dis*pleasure, is loudly singing along to 'Midnight Confessions'. Crucially, this scene is itself 'set up' by another, earlier one situated in Melanie's apartment where Louis is talking on the phone to Ordell ('What the fuck are you still doing there?!') and the Guess Who's 'Undun' is playing in the background – in Melanie's bedroom and behind closed doors (not unlike the rape scene in *Pulp Fiction*).

Although Louis, who is annoyed at being lectured by Ordell ('Well you're the one in motherfuckin' charge.... Go in there, snatch her by the hair, and drag her big ass out'), is arguably the one 'undone' here, Melanie's choice of music – the Grassroots – contrasts unfavourably with Jackie's musical taste, which is funky, old-school cool. More generally, just as the film's soundtrack privileges 'black' over 'white'

45 The Guess Who (1964), the Grass Roots (1964), and the Delfonics (1965) were all founded at roughly the same time. However, while the sound of the Grass Roots could be characterized as soul, albeit 'white pop-soul', the difference could not be greater between the 'classic', 'hard' album-rock of the Guess Who – epitomized by the guitarwork of Randy Bachman – and the anti-Stax, (French) horn-and-strings 'Philly sound' of the Delfonics, featuring the tenor of William Hart.

music (so that Melanie's obvious enjoyment of 'Midnight Confessions' underlines her lack of 'soul'), so *Jackie Brown*, subtly mobilizing 'white guilt', valorizes a particular, idealized version of black femininity – *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill, 1974) without the T&A – at the direct expense of white femininity.

How else explain the ostensibly 'totally fun' scene where Melanie is murdered by Louis? We are presumably supposed to understand this sudden, brutal act, as Tarantino intends, as payment for Melanie's treachery (as well as, perhaps, for Louis's inability to deal with a 'natural-born smartass' [p. 181] like her). Still, such diegetic motivation hardly seems to do justice to the final image of Melanie, whose legs – once the object of the camera's steady fetishized gaze – stick out from under a row of cars like the Wicked Witch of the West's. This excessive image in turn returns us, not unlike that of the repressed, to the issue of 'binding': if, as Willemen proposes, the valence of any given pleasure is a function of the meaning 'viewers' attach to a particular character taking a particular action in a particular circumstance, whose pleasure are we talking about here? Whether and to what degree Louis is a surrogate for the director must, inevitably, remain moot, but about one thing we can be sure, Louis takes enormous pleasure in killing Melanie:

> Louis whips out the beretta Ordell gave him, shoots [Melanie] ... BAM ... in the belly ... BAM ... Louis shoots her again on the ground. One; to make sure. Two; cause it felt good. (p. 187)

Louis's recourse to force here (via *Ordell's* beretta) exposes him as a 'pale', pathetic imitation of the real thing – of, that is, his partner's easy sexual and physical mastery of the world around him. Meanwhile, even as Melanie lies dead in the parking lot of the Del Amo Mall, Ordell, in a moment of dramatic irony that suggests that Tarantino is not unaware of the scopic economy he has set in motion, is happily ensconced at a 'titty bar' in downtown Los Angeles. In other words, when Louis shoots Melanie it is not only the beginning of the end for him, it is only a matter of time before Ordell himself has to *face the music* (since he is now wanted for Beaumont's and Louis's deaths).

Given Tarantino's own retro-blaxploitative revision of Leonard's novel, it is no accident that although Jackie practices shooting Max's revolver in his office while waiting for Ordell to arrive (having earlier, in an echo of a famously ultra-violent scene in *Foxy Brown*, pointed the same gun at Ordell's crotch),[46] she does not kill him. If Melanie is a chick without a gun, a wannabe playa who should never have left her bedroom and the sanctuary of her Playa del Rey apartment, Jackie herself, even when outfitted in her 'total power suit', is no Foxy Brown.

The smile that finally lights up her face at the end of *Jackie Brown* as Bobby Womack's 'Across 110th Street' plays in the background enacts a double measure: Jackie's deliverance from the gangsta life that

46 When Ordell visits Jackie's apartment after she's been released from jail and he puts his hands around her throat, she presses Max's gun against Ordell's 'dick'. Jackie's command to Ordell is also noteworthy for its sarcastic reiteration of his demotic patois: 'Now take your hands from around my throat, *nigga*' (my emphasis, p. 79). This moment is reiterated when Ordell, talking to Louis about the bungled money-exchange, realizes that Jackie Brown is the 'architect' (p. 162) of the double-cross: 'Gotcha, nigga' (p. 198).

the other Foxy Brown raps about in the record store where Max – in a 'moony' romantic haze as profound as Tarantino's – is buying *The Best of The Delfonics*, as well as Pam Grier's own transcendence, however mixed or muted, of the caged persona with which she first made her name.

Conclusion/counterpoint: post-soul music or pre-gangsta rap?

I organize family style / Lady Godiva, forever Firm Fox Boogie never lonely / We were wed in Holy Matrimony.
Foxy Brown.[47]

47 Foxy Brown, '(Holy Matrimony) Letter to the Firm', on her debut album *III Na Na* (Def Jam, 1996).

Tarantino, like Lynch, has a thing for ears. Just as the noirish plot of *Blue Velvet* (1986) is precipitated by the severed ear that Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) finds in an abandoned field, so *Reservoir Dogs* pivots – at least in terms of imagined graphic violence – on the scene where Mr Blonde cuts off officer Nash's ear, then talks to it as if it were an anatomical microphone: 'Hey, what's goin' on? Did ya hear that?' Ultimately, what both Lynch and Tarantino have in common is an uncommon interest in aurality: their art, not unlike van Gogh's (Frank Booth [Dennis Hopper] to the 'ear's widow': 'Stay alive, baby ... do it for van Gogh'),[48] is all about the colours, the prismatic tones and timbres, of cinematic sound.

48 See 'Ears', in Barnes and Hearn, *Tarantino, A to Zed*, pp. 49–51.

There are also, of course, very real differences between the two directors, one of which is that Lynch's audiovisual aesthetic derives from the 1950s, while Tarantino's 'musical imaginary', true to his generation, has its origins in the 1970s. In fact, Tarantino's explicit investment in this specific 'structure of feeling' can be gleaned from the following remark he made in defence of his use of Kool and the Gang's 'Jungle Boogie' (1974) in *Pulp Fiction*: 'Growing up in the Seventies gives you an appreciation for music that came out in the Seventies that no-one else on the planet has an appreciation for unless you grew up listening to it'.[49]

49 Quoted in ibid., p. 81.

Tarantino's hyper-possessive take on 1970s popular music is patently false (nobody 'owns' the music, popular or otherwise, of any period); however, it does suggest, as I have endeavoured to elucidate in this essay, that the audiovisual complexion of a film such as *Jackie Brown* cannot be fully appreciated without some sense of its popular-musical conditions of possibility. Consider, in addition to the sound clip from *Detroit 9000* (Arthur Marks, 1973), the scene set in Melanie's apartment where Ordell is explaining to Jackie that there has been a slight change in plan because Simone has suddenly 'split' and absconded with ten grand of his hard-earned money. If Ordell's conversation with Jackie (and, therefore, his audio track) might be said to be foregrounded in this scene, it is also audiovisually counterpointed by what is happening in the foreground, where Louis and Melanie are lying on the couch, no doubt wasted from smoking weed, watching

Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry on television. John Hough's 1974 low-budget, heist/car-chase flick stars Peter Fonda and Susan George as two outlaws on the run, who, as the screenplay puts it, 'make jokes as they're pursued by police cars' (p. 165), but the joke, as it were, is on Louis and Melanie whose 'relationship' is deteriorating by the minute and who, in the imminent future, will be at each other's throats. In other words, in this scene Tarantino not only engages the visual axis in the form of television to comment on the filmic 'action', he expertly plays the 1970s (the historical moment of Hough's movie) off the 1990s (the time period in which *Jackie Brown* is set).

More generally, while I have been concerned to show how Tarantino's audiophilia – specifically, his use of music – impacts on the narrative dynamics of *Jackie Brown* as well as its racial and sexual economy, I would be remiss if I did not observe that the film's 'musical imaginary' (which has a very 1970s feel) should also be seen *and* heard in conjunction with the 1990s, understood as a constitutive, if mostly absent, popular-musical 'structure of feeling'. Accordingly, it might not be too much to say that the audio format of *Jackie Brown* is not so much monoaural as stereophonic where, say, 1970s 'old-school' soul acts as a screen of sorts for 1990s 'new-school' gangsta rap (which is, if you will, offscreen). As for the film's popular-musical conditions of possibility (*Jackie Brown* appeared in 1997), it is worth remembering that 1996 not only marked the release from Death Row/Interscope of Snoop Dogg's *Tha Doggfather* and 2Pac's *All Eyez on Me* (the first two-CD rap record), it also arguably marked the demise of Suge Knight's thuggish empire – and West Coast gangsta rap in general – in the charismatic body of Pac himself, who was shot and killed in September of that year.

Though *Jackie Brown* does sample East Coast gangsta rap by way of Foxy Brown, it is striking, especially given that she was associated at the time with the Firm,[50] that Tarantino did not reference one of the bona fide heirs to Biggie and 2Pac, Nas (whose 1996 *It Was Written* was the followup to his 1994 smash debut, *Illmatic*) or his soon-to-be lyrical adversary, Jay-Z (whose *Reasonable Doubt* [1996] was the audacious beginning of the Roc-A-Fella dynasty). This omission – if one can call Tarantino's decision not to use West Coast rap in a mid-1990s film set in LA's South Bay an omission – may well be related to the frequently-lodged charge that his films are driven by a postmodern historicism, all pastiche and retro-grade aesthetics, which views the past as a mere succession of cinematic tableaux.

The stereophonic character of *Jackie Brown*'s soundscape suggests, however, that the scenario is rather more complex. First, one can certainly understand why Tarantino would want to reference the female rapper Foxy Brown rather than, say, Lil' Kim, since the former owes her moniker and even some of her do-or-die ethos and lethal sexual appeal to Pam Grier's blaxploitation persona. Second, whereas the extensive use of 1990s gangsta rap in *Jackie Brown* might have

50 The song in question, Foxy Brown's 'Letter to the Firm' ('I'm married to the Firm ... you gotta understand / I'll die for 'em, gimme a chair and then I'll fry for 'em') provides a striking counterpoint to Max's, not to mention Jackie's and Ordell's, musical tastes; it also prefigures Tarantino's extensive use of the RZA in the first 'volume' of *Kill Bill* (2003).

resulted in a reduced mimetic relation between sound and image, effectively collapsing the acoustic space of the film, the steady employment of 1990s R&B arguably deepens or 'doubles' it, introducing a tension between 1970s music and 1990s 'look' and, in the process, producing a certain audiovisual 'volume'. Finally and most importantly, the quite audible presence of classic soul music in *Jackie Brown* obviously reflects Tarantino's desire to showcase Pam Grier, albeit not the 'mythical', 'super-bad-momma' that audiences, like Tarantino, tend to associate with her younger, 'badder' self.[51]

Rather, as the director himself has said, it's '*Coffy* 20 years later, *Foxy Brown* 20 years later'.[52] In other words, it is Pam Grier not as Foxy but Jackie Brown: not some scopic fantasy, a gangsta Lady Godiva 'walking down the street to burn Harlem' to the ground but a 'woman working in this world', a woman with her feet planted firmly *on* the ground.[53]

51 Tarantino, 'Interview' (1998), interviewed by Adrian Wootton. http://film.guardian.co.uk/Guardian NFT/Interview.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

Horror of a different kind: dissonant voices of the new Turkish cinema

ASUMAN SUNER

Having emerged as a popular form of entertainment in the 1950s,[1] Turkish cinema's 'golden years' came during the 1960s and early 1970s. Popular Turkish cinema of this period is generally called 'Yeşilçam cinema', after the street in Istanbul where film production companies gathered. At its peak, an average of 200 films a year were produced by Yeşilçam cinema. In 1966, Turkey was fourth in terms of world film production after the USA, India and Egypt, making 229 films.[2] Turkish cinema also became very popular in other Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Iran and Iraq, but after this period of successful commercial growth Yeşilçam had, by the 1980s, practically died away. The prime reason for this downfall was the paradoxical situation that there had never been a truly powerful film industry in Turkey, despite the appearance of commercial vitality in popular cinema. During the heyday of Yeşilçam, commercially-minded producers invested the huge revenues that they extracted from cinema not back into the film industry but into other sectors of the economy. As a result, whilst this commercial vitality during the 1960s and the 1970s made certain producers and stars rich, the foundations of the film industry remained vulnerable to fluctuations in the market. Amongst the developments causing substantial financial problems for producers by the mid 1970s were the increasing production costs created by the transition to colour cinematography, political turmoil which prevented families – the traditional audience of Yeşilçam – from attending public events, and a nationwide expansion of television broadcasting.[3] As a result, Turkish cinema faced a crisis during the 1980s, with an average of just ten films being produced per year. Even more discouraging was

1 The production of the first narrative Turkish film goes back to 1916. Prior to the 1950s, the early decades of Turkish cinema had been dominated by what is known as the 'drama school tradition' that relied heavily on the theatrical adaptations of European plays.

2 Ersan Ilal, 'On Turkish cinema', in John D.H. Downing (ed.), *Film and Politics in the Third World* (New York, NY: Autonomedia, 1987), pp. 119–29, 123.

3 Nilgün Abisel, *Türk Sineması Üzerine Yazılar* (Istanbul: Imge, 1994), p. 106.

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the air of demoralization that Turkish cinema had to face during the years following the 1980 military coup. In the oppressive political and social atmosphere created by the military regime, popular Turkish cinema became estranged from its traditional audience and could not keep pace with the transformation of society. Apart from a handful of 'serious' social realist films that received international critical acclaim, such as Yılmaz Güney's *Yol/The Way* (1982),[4] the term 'Turkish film' had become a joke, synonymous with bad taste and banality.

After a decade of severe recession and crisis, the mid 1990s bore witness to a remarkable revival of Turkish cinema in two distinct areas: a new popular cinema achieving considerable box-office success, and what might be called an 'art cinema' receiving critical acclaim and awards at national and international festivals.[5] The motivating force behind both modes of film production was a new generation of young directors who made their first feature films during the 1990s.

Yavuz Turgul's 1996 film *Eşkiya/The Bandit* is generally held to have inaugurated new popular Turkish cinema. Merging classical 'Yeşilçam' themes (love versus money; personal integrity versus material success, and so on) with a Hollywood-style presentation, *The Bandit* became not only a major blockbuster, but also a blueprint for future box-office success.[6] Following its formula, popular Turkish films of the last decade have sought to combine technical features of contemporary Hollywood blockbusters (fast editing, mobile camera, an emphasis on action, flawless mise-en-scene, and so forth) with an ironic handling of 'Yeşilçam' themes. As for its production, the new popular Turkish cinema has generated its financial and artistic resources not so much from the film business, but from other areas of the culture industry, most notably television and advertising. Being successful professionals in the television and/or advertising sectors, the star directors of this cinema (Sinan Çetin, Yılmaz Erdoğan and others) finance their big-budget films (usually costing somewhere between US$500,000 and US$800,000) with the help of the revenues and business contacts generated from these sectors.[7] Receiving widespread promotion and distribution in the domestic market, popular Turkish films usually achieve a considerable degree of box-office success, with audiences of between one and two million.

If popular films constitute the flamboyant side of the new Turkish cinema, what might be called 'art cinema' is a less conspicuous, but equally noteworthy, element. Two names in this category stand out as auteur directors of the new Turkish cinema due to the peculiarity of their *oeuvre*: Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz. Inspired by Hamid Naficy, the way that I use the term 'auteur' here is not intended to evoke its conventional connotations such as artistic mastery and distinguished talent;[8] instead, I wish to employ the term in relation to the question of engagement with cinematic practices and social formations.

Both Ceylan and Demirkubuz made their first feature films during

4 Those Turkish films that received critical international acclaim during the 1980s were not usually exhibited in Turkey due to censorship and banishment. *Yol/The Way*, which poses a powerful critique of Turkish society under military rule, could not be released in Turkey until the mid 1990s. Yılmaz Güney himself escaped to Europe after the 1980 military coup. Since his citizenship was revoked, he could never returned to his country and died in exile.

5 Like all classificatory categories, the distinction between 'popular' and 'art' cinemas is far from being unproblematic, for it cannot be made on the basis of unprejudiced or neutral criteria. Besides, there might be many examples which do not easily fit into either of these categories.

6 Nezih Erdoğan, 'Mute bodies, disembodied voices: notes on sound in Turkish popular cinema', *Screen*, vol. 43, no. 3 (2002), pp. 233–49.

7 Funda Ödemiş, 'Cameras are still rolling: making a film in Turkey', unpublished paper presented at Visions of Modernity: Cinema and Visual Culture in Turkey, University of Texas, Austin, 27–28 March 2003

8 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 4.

the second half of the 1990s and have since developed somewhat unconventional cinematic styles, each characterized by a thematic and visual unity.[9] The three feature films that Ceylan has made so far can be considered as a trilogy because of the obvious thematic continuity between the stories. Although Demirkubuz tells an independent story in each of his films, there are many self-referential allusions in the five that he has made so far. There is also a degree of self-inscription in the case of both directors that manifests itself in occasional appearances of Demirkubuz in his own films, and in the highly autobiographical tone of Ceylan's cinema. Through self-referentiality and self-inscription, Ceylan and Demirkubuz not only foreground their authorial presence within the text, they also render it problematic.

Both Ceylan and Demirkubuz adopt a small-scale, artisanal mode of production. For both directors, working with low budgets of US$50,000 to US$100,000 is not a matter of necessity but of preference.[10] Both perform multiple roles in the process of film production, including writing, shooting, editing and acting.[11] Both work with the same small crew, and in the case of Ceylan with non-professional actors including family members.

As to the question of reception, although the films by Ceylan and Demirkubuz do not do very well at the box office (partly due to their limited distribution and promotion and partly to their relative inaccessibility for ordinary audiences), they have proved to be notably successful at national and international festivals. As well as the critical acclaim and awards received at many other festivals, the two most recent films by Demirkubuz, *Yazgı/Fate* (2001) and *İtiraf/Confession* (2001), were included in the *Un certain regard* section of the 2002 Cannes Festival – the first time that two Turkish films received an invitation from Cannes in the same year. Similarly, Ceylan's latest film, *Uzak/Distant* (2003), won both the Grand Jury Prize and acting awards for its two male leads (Mehmet Emin Toprak and Muzaffer Özdemir) at the 2003 Cannes Festival.[12] This was the first time since 1982 (when Güney's *Yol* shared the *Palme d'Or* with Costa Gavras's *Missing*) that a Turkish film received an award at the Cannes Festival.

As we witness the development of the new Turkish cinema along these two separate tracks, it is interesting to observe that despite their obvious differences there is a strong thematic continuity connecting popular and art cinemas, characterized by an obsession with the tropes of 'home' and 'belonging'. This thematic fixation can be seen as a response to a growing anxiety in Turkish society around the questions of identity and belonging following the 1980 military coup.

During the first half of the 1980s Turkey underwent a widespread implementation of neoliberal policies (privatization and deregulation), counselled by the International Monetary Fund under the patronage of the military government.[13] A number of groundbreaking legal and technological reforms were also initiated in the 1980s, particularly in the information and communications sectors, paving the way for

9 Demirkubuz made his first feature film, *C Blok/Block C* in 1994, which was followed by *Masumiyet/Innocence* (1997), *Üçüncü Sayfa/Third Page* (2000), *Yazgı/Fate* (2001) and *İtiraf/Confession* (2001). The three feature films that Ceylan has made so far are *Kasaba/The Small Town* (1998), *Mayıs Sıkıntısı/Clouds of May* (1999) and *Uzak/Distant* (2003).

10 The preference for low budget is perceived by both Ceylan and Demirkubuz not only as a matter of finance, but rather as related to one's political and ethical positioning. In an interview, Ceylan indicates that minimalism is important for him not only in terms of budget considerations, but in terms of the use of the film medium at large. Minimalism, he argues, is his own mode of resistance to the culture of excessiveness and the craze of consumption characterizing our contemporary world. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* (Istanbul: Norgunk, 2003), p. 121. In a similar way, Demirkubuz depicts himself as a minimalist person and indicates that he would not wish to work with a bigger budget even if he had a choice. Unpublished interview conducted with Demirkubuz in Istanbul, October 2002.

11 Demirkubuz himself plays the leading role in his latest film, *Bekleme Odası/Waiting Room*, currently in production. The film seems to have a self-reflexive story in the sense that it is about a director who is making a film adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

12 Mehmet Emin Toprak, Ceylan's cousin and the amateur actor playing in his three films, tragically died in a car crash the day after *Distant* was selected for the 2003 Cannes Festival. Sharing the Best Actor award in Cannes with Muzaffer Özdemir, the other lead in the film, Toprak became the first actor ever to win a prize in Cannes posthumously.

13 Çağlar Keyder and Ayşe Öncü, *Istanbul and the Concept of World Cities* (Istanbul: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1993), p. 19.

Turkey's full integration into the global capitalist system. These transformations, while making it possible for certain segments of Turkish society to become fully assimilated into the globalizing world, also produced a worsening income gap and social polarization. In addition, Turkey experienced throughout most of the 1990s a protracted conflict between separatist Kurdish guerillas and the Turkish army which claimed the lives of an estimated thirty thousand people, most of Kurdish origin. As a consequence of these intensified transformations and traumatic processes, questions of belonging and identity in Turkish society have become sites of intense and conflicting emotions, manifested in the growing popularity of nationalist discourses on the one hand, and increased cynicism about, and distrust of, community relations and collective identity on the other.

This essay aims to discuss the treatment of the tropes of 'home' and 'belonging' by the two foremost auteur directors of the new Turkish cinema, Ceylan and Demirkubuz. I shall characterize these directors as the 'dissonant voices' of the new Turkish cinema in the sense that their films represent a convoluted aesthetic and political response to the problems around the questions of belonging and identity in contemporary Turkish society. I shall attempt to show that 'belonging' is treated in the films by these directors as a troubled terrain, while 'home' is rendered a prime site of the uncanny. I will focus on particular films by each director, Ceylan's *Kasaba/Small Town* (1998) and *Mayıs Sıkıntısı/Clouds of May* (1999) and Demirkubuz's *Üçüncü Sayfa/Third Page* (2000).

Popular cinema and the nostalgic recovery of home

Questions of home, belonging and identity have constituted the main thematic concerns of the new popular cinema in Turkey since the making of *The Bandit* in 1996. Telling the story of Baran, a Kurdish bandit who is released from prison after having served a thirty-five-year sentence, *The Bandit* voices a tacit critique of the rapid transformation of post-1980 Turkish society. At the beginning of the film, Baran returns to his village in Eastern Anatolia that he had left thirty-five years before, only to find it submerged under the waters of a new dam. With nothing left for him in his native village, he decides to go to Istanbul to find his relatives. On the train he meets a young man from Istanbul, Cumali, whose life revolves around nightclubs and gambling dens. Together with Cumali, Baran experiences the harsh realities of poverty, violence and alienation in Istanbul, which make him, a bandit, seem innocent in comparison. Through Baran's touching and tragicomic story, *The Bandit* poses the traditional values of honesty, heroism and honour represented by the ageing Kurdish bandit against the rising neoliberal values of the 1990s. Istanbul is depicted in the film as a locus of brutal capitalist relations, relentless materialism and cultural degeneration, whereas the rural East becomes the idealized site

of an imaginary home. Thus the film invokes a nostalgic yearning for the period prior to the transformation of Turkish society during the last two decades.

After the enormous success of *The Bandit*, the nostalgic revival of the traditional modes of belonging became a prevailing thematic component in not only popular films, but also in popular television dramas of the last decade. Feudal and patriarchal relations, provincial small-town life, religious and folkloric traditions have all been reinvented as sites of collective fantasy and desire.

The nostalgic trend in popular cinema took a recent turn with Yılmaz Erdoğan's film *Vizontele* (2000), a film that became the largest box-office success in Turkish film history.[14] The new nostalgic mode initiated by *Vizontele* is characterized by stories focusing on community life in provincial towns, usually during the 1970s prior to the 1980 military coup. Provincial town life of the past is viewed in these films through rose-tinted spectacles as a lost paradise. While the stories emphasize cordiality and the warmth of human relations from a humorous as well as a sentimental viewpoint, the mise-en-scene is dominated by aestheticized images of the rural landscape. Popular nostalgia films seem to attribute innocence, harmony and purity to traditional community relations. The story usually ends in these films at a moment when the state of euphoria is about to be irrevocably lost due to the intervention of an external force. This external force could be the construction of a dam, as in *The Bandit*, or the introduction of television broadcasting to a remote town, as in *Vizontele*. In any case, the films consistently create a sense of 'beforeness' to describe how things used to be *before* the intervention of an external force and the consequent deterioration of society. The intervening external force in these films can be read as an allusion to the transformation of Turkish society during the aftermath of the 1980 coup.

Popular nostalgia films are usually associated with what might be called mild leftwing oppositional politics, in the sense that they undertake an indirect critique of the transformation of Turkish society during the last two decades through an idealized representation of the 1970s. The subtle implication of these films is such that no matter how degenerated and corrupt we recently have become as a society, there is still something intrinsically good, innocent and virtuous about who we are. The source of this presumed virtue is located usually in relation to local and /or minority ethnic and religious identities, such as being of Kurdish origin. Although the films make references to minority cultures in the use of music, costumes and proper names, the question of cultural difference as an ideological and political issue is not usually openly discussed.[15]

Though popular nostalgia films seem to take a critical stance towards the transformation of Turkish society after the coup, they contain a kind of ideological blind spot that tames their critique. Suggesting that traditional modes of belonging in Turkish society have recently

14 Directed by a Yılmaz Erdoğan, a popular standup comedian and television star of the 1990s, *Vizontele* reached cinema audiences of well over three million in Turkey on its release in 2000.

15 For more information on Turkish nostalgia films of the 1990s, see Asuman Suner, 'Nostalgia for an imaginary home: memory, space and identity in the new Turkish cinema', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 27 (2002), pp. 61–76.

deteriorated as an effect of the outside forces (military regime, globalization, neoliberal policies, and so on), popular films attribute an inherent virtue to what they imagine as 'home', and never actually put it under critical scrutiny.

Houses of horror

The themes of home and belonging occupy as central a place in the new art cinema of the 1990s as in its popular counterpart. Instead of preserving the presumed innocence of home by externalizing malice, however, the films reveal the deep sense of instability and angst inherent in it.

Freud's well-known concept of the 'uncanny' is employed by film studies mostly in relation to the horror genre. Seeking to explain the feeling that arouses threat and horror, Freud suggests that what we experience as 'uncanny', as opposed to our common assumptions, is 'in reality nothing new or alien, but something that is familiar and old established in the mind which has become alienated from it if only through the process of repression'.[16] Freud associates the ultimate experience of the uncanny with the most familiar place, the subject's former home, the womb, hence the figure of the mother. Speaking of the uncanny feeling that his male patients declare to have about female genital organs, he writes:

> This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *heim* (home) of all human beings, to the place where anyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a humorous saying: 'Love is home sickness' and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, still in the dream, 'this place is familiar to me, I have been there before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body.[17]

Psychoanalytic film theory discloses the way that the horror genre draws upon this association between the sense of 'uncanny' and the mother's body through the figure of the 'haunted house'. 'The house is haunted,' Barbara Creed writes, 'by the ghost or trace of a memory which takes the individual back to the early, perhaps foetal, relation with the womb.'[18] Here, considering the range of cases that Freud discusses in relation to the feeling of the uncanny, I suggest that the scope of the concept is not necessarily limited to a manifest sense of terror as illustrated by the horror genre, but rather includes a wider array of experiences and sensations.

The cinemas of Ceylan and Demirkubuz, in this regard, can be said to articulate a horror of a different kind. They draw upon the horrors of everyday life by exposing mundane acts of violence lurking beneath the surface of normality. The house appears as a site of the uncanny in the

16 Sigmund Freud, 'The uncanny', in *On Creativity and the Unconscious* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1958), pp. 122–61, 149.

17 Ibid., p. 153.

18 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 54.

sense that it is haunted by a routine malice. Though they both invoke a sense of the uncanny in relation to home, Ceylan and Demirkubuz tell different stories in their films by using different cinematic styles.

Often compared to the neorealist mode of Iranian cinema, represented particularly by Abbas Kiarostami, Ceylan's cinema presents a peculiar blend of documentary and fiction. His films typically offer a loose account of everyday life in their slow and somewhat monotonous pace. The three feature films that Ceylan has made so far can be considered as parts of a trilogy since they tell different temporal segments of the same story, with the same characters played by his relatives. All three films revolve around the same trope: real and imagined journeys of homecoming and escape from home. Characters contemplate the possible consequences of these experiences as they observe the geographical and cultural environment surrounding them. Depicting tiny details of everyday life without seeking to reach any particular conclusion, the films simply appear to bear witness to this contemplative mode. As in the films of Kiarostami, the ordinary situations of everyday life in Ceylan's films seem to be both all too real and yet somewhat skewed and bizarre, because of the director's constant interrogation of the nature of cinematic reality.

The Small Town, Ceylan's first feature film, tells the story of three generations of a family living in a provincial town near Canakkale, a northwestern city. Shot in black and white, the film eloquently captures rhythms of nature, cycles of rural life and the daily concerns of townspeople. The sole source of tension in the narrative is a longlasting debate among family members about whether one should leave one's home town or not. Saffet, a young man in his twenties, wants to leave the town for a better life elsewhere, whereas his middle-aged uncle argues the virtues of staying in one's home town and making it a better place. The elderly father, seeming to possess the wisdom of old age, tries to ease the tension by pointing to the ironies of both positions.

The Small Town entails an autobiographical 'homecoming' journey for Ceylan himself, since he returned to his own home town to make this film which reflects upon his own childhood memories. Casting and acting further accentuate the highly autobiographical tone of the film and give it the look of a documentary. Saffet, the main character, is played by Mehmet Emin Toprak, a young factory worker and Ceylan's real-life cousin, while the elderly couple are Ceylan's own parents.

In *Clouds of May*, Ceylan takes a further step into his self-reflexive exploration of the theme of homecoming, and this time makes a film about the making of his previous film, *The Small Town*. The main character in *Clouds of May*, Muzaffer (Muzaffer Özdemir), is a young director like Ceylan himself, returning to his home town to make a film about it. In the first part of the film we see Muzaffer searching for locations and actors. He conducts interviews with townspeople and makes some trial shots. He has a hard time convincing his reluctant parents to play the elderly couple in the film; his father is particularly

unwilling, not only because he finds the idea of 'acting' awkward for a man of his age, but also because he is very concerned with saving the small forest he cultivates on his property from confiscation by the authorities. Muzaffer's cousin Saffet (played by Mehmet Emin Toprak), on the other hand, willingly agrees to take part in the film, which he sees as an opportunity to leave the town and move to Istanbul with the help of Muzaffer (just like the character he plays in *The Small Town*).[19]

In both *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May*, what constitutes the thematic and visual locus of the films is not so much 'home', but 'home town' as a geographical and cultural locality. The everyday life of townspeople mostly takes place outdoors: the countryside provides a natural playground for children after school, while patios and gardens are the places for adults to get together and chat. The landscape shots dominating both films are utterly beautiful in their plain, yet graceful rendering of nature. Despite the predominance of shots depicting lovely scenery, however, *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May* convey a strong sense of claustrophobia and immobility. 'Home town', in both films, appears as an engulfing space limiting the social horizon of its inhabitants. What lurks beneath the calm rhythm of life in the countryside is an overwhelming sense of monotony and boredom.[20] The gloomy side of small-town life is expressed in both films most intensely by Saffet, Muzaffer's young cousin, who desperately seeks to make people understand that his entire life will be engraved by this provincial town unless he runs away. In *The Small Town*, Saffet is portrayed as a young, rebellious man who believes, contrary to the elderly members of the family who want him to find a job and get married, that he has no future in his home town, no matter what he does. In *Clouds of May*, Saffet appears this time as a young man who helps out Muzaffer in making a film. His main motivation in getting involved in Muzaffer's project is to find a way to escape. The beauty of the landscape that Muzaffer admires so much does not make much sense to Saffet since he can only see an unchanging environment which offers him no prospects in life. The only time that Saffet appreciates the beauty of his home town, he explains in *The Small Town*, is the morning that he left it to join the army. It seems that one is capable of loving one's home town only at the moment of leaving it. The same holds true for Muzaffer, and by the same token for Ceylan. Muzaffer is able to retain a positive view on his home town because he has already left it behind. To see the beauty of 'home', it seems, distance is required. 'Home', in other words, can be perceived as a 'felicitous space', in Gaston Bachelard's words, only from outside, from a distance, when it becomes a memory.[21] We need the 'partiality of imagination' to envisage home as a site of protection, intimacy and well-being.[22] The felicitous quality of home gets lost when we get too close to it. Excessive proximity kills imagination. Home becomes an engulfing hole when one is stuck in it.

19 The story of *Distant*, Ceylan's third and the latest film, is a continuation of *Clouds of May* in the sense that it depicts what would happen if Saffet's dreams of leaving his home town and moving to Istanbul were to come true.

20 A straight translation of the Turkish title 'Mayıs Sıkıntısı' into English would actually be not 'Clouds of May, but 'Boredom of May'.

21 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: the Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994).

22 Ibid., p. xxxv.

What haunts 'home' in Ceylan's films, then, is not only the condition of boredom and monotony, but also excessive proximity. Ceylan's camera meticulously searches for the minuscule details of everyday life that convey this sensation. One such detail is captured in the extreme closeup shots of the faces and bodies of the characters. On one occasion, for example, we see the feet of Ceylan's mother in a lengthy closeup shot. Lying down on a couch, the elderly woman complains to her husband about the itchiness that prevents her from sleeping at night, as the camera shows in closeup one foot rubbing against the other. The situation is very familiar and ordinary. The mother suffers from a minor health problem and disagrees with her husband about the source of it. She thinks that it is hereditary, while the husband claims that it is because of the heavy food that she is in the habit of eating. Throughout this argument, the camera continues to show the mother's bare, worn-out feet. What produces an uncanny effect throughout this scene is precisely the excessive familiarity of the image. What comes as a shock, in other words, is the way that the camera positions the audience in a condition of excessive proximity with what is all too familiar, the mother's body. It is interesting to note that the female foot is one of the favourite fetish objects in cinema. If fetishism is primarily based on the repression of the mother's body,[23] the bare feet of Ceylan's mother in this scene, far from being turned into a fetish object, seem to expose what fetishism seeks to disavow.

23 Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 12.

Home as a site of the uncanny is also invoked by the visual metaphors that Ceylan employs in his films. One such recurring visual motif in both *The Small Town* and *Clouds of May* is the image of a turtle. In *Clouds of May* Muzaffer is very much interested in filming turtles, while in *The Small Town* the image of the turtle turns into a symbol. Towards the beginning of the film, we see a little sister and brother (the grandchildren of the family) wandering around the meadows after school. At one point, the little boy sees a turtle on the ground and begins to watch it. His sister explains that if a turtle is placed upside down, it will die since it cannot turn over onto its feet again. After a while, they walk away. A few minutes later, the small boy runs back and, after a moment's hesitation, turns the turtle upside down. At night, the image of the upturned turtle returns to haunt him in his dreams. When family members subsequently get together in the small forest for a picnic, the little boy falls asleep on his mother's knees. In a dream sequence, he first sees the worried face of his mother looking through a window, then the image of the upturned turtle desperately moving its legs. The next image is again that of the mother on her knees performing *namaz* (the Islamic ritual of worship). The boy then sees himself asleep in his bed, as his mother looks through the bedroom window. He wakes up in the dream and sees his mother lying in a strange position (reminiscent of the one taken in *namaz*) on the platform at the edge of the window. The woman appears to bend down on her body, pulling her legs and arms near to her head as though she

The dream sequence in *The Small Town* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 1998)

wants to cover herself up. The curved profile of the figure resembles that of a turtle. The boy gets scared in the dream and begs his mother to get off the platform but the woman's body falls from it. The final image of the dream, or nightmare, sequence is that of the upturned turtle desperately trying to move.

The image of the turtle in *The Small Town* is articulated into different layers of meaning. For one thing, the turtle symbolizes home in Turkish culture, since it is known as an animal carrying its house on its back. The turtle not only carries its house, however, but is completely confined by it. The turtle's house is a prison house; the turtle actually *is* its house. Then, even when it is not upturned, the turtle is captured in its own house, captured by itself. Seen in this way, the turtle as a symbol perfectly embodies the comforting as well as the uncanny side of belonging. What protects and comforts also captures and imprisons. Belonging is a kind of shelter and a baggage that the subject cannot possibly be rid of.

Aside from these implications, what is also interesting is the return of the tormented turtle in the boy's dream. The little act of cruelty remains totally unexplained and unresolved. There is nothing in the story that provides a logical explanation for such an act. This little 'innocent' malice, which seems to be a result of a momentary impulse of curiosity and viciousness, deeply disturbs the seemingly calm and peaceful mood of the film. The association of the image of an upturned turtle with the mother's body appears to be a reminder of something irreducibly uncanny about belonging.

Ceylan's cinema locates the sources of the uncanny experience in the normality of everyday life. Home, with all its familiarity and intimacy, could be an engulfing space, a site of 'harmless' horror. The kind of horror that haunts home in Ceylan's cinema is not something that could be externalized or resolved, it is inscribed rather in the very idea of belonging.

Ceylan's highly subjective contemplation on the theme of

homecoming finds its reverse counterpart in Demirkubuz's cinema in the covert theme of homelessness. Demirkubuz's films revolve around journeys of entrapment in a social labyrinth, where the characters are constantly on the move without going anywhere. Unlike Ceylan's open-ended documentary style, Demirkubuz's cinema is based on tightly structured plots with melodramatic overtones. His films revolve around highly agitated characters captivated by harsh social and/or economic realities, and he describes his characters as 'disempowered, entrapped and weak'.[24] They are caught up in situations from which there is no way out. They do not feel at home anywhere in the world, neither in the place that they inhabit, nor in their own identities and bodies. The prevailing mood in Demirkubuz's films is that of despair enveloped by a dark sense of irony. As opposed to the ordinary situations of everyday life depicted by Ceylan, Demirkubuz's films always draw upon highly dramatic and violent events often involving murder and/or suicide.

24 Unpublished interview, conducted in Istanbul, October 2002.

The desperate mood arising from the condition of entrapment in Demirkubuz's films is visually conveyed in the mise-en-scene through the excessive use of claustrophobic interiors. Events usually take place in gloomy apartments or hotel rooms that are all alike. In those rare instances when urban space is shown, all the signs demarcating the specificity of space are effaced to an extent that the city becomes unrecognizable as a particular locality. As a result, whether shot in a small city or in Istanbul, all the outdoor shots in Demirkubuz's films somehow reproduce the dull and gloomy atmosphere of an anonymous provincial town.

Demirkubuz's 2000 film *Third Page* takes its title from the type of news typically appearing on page three of Turkish dailies – domestic abuse, 'crimes of passion', and so forth. Although it is set in Istanbul, the film does not reflect in the slightest the historical and geographical sights of that spectacular city. Instead, most of the story takes place in the gloomy atmosphere of the basement apartment of its main character. *Third Page* tells the story of Isa (Ruhi Sarı), a television extra, who is beaten up and threatened by a gangster over fifty dollars that he is supposed to have stolen. Back at Isa's basement apartment, as he prepares to blow out his brains in desperation, Isa's landlord suddenly shows up to demand his back rent. In the throes of a nervous breakdown, Isa follows the landlord to his apartment, shoots him dead and then himself passes out. On waking, he is surprised to find himself back in his own apartment. Taking Isa's testimony along with that of the other tenants, the police are unable to solve the case and do not charge anyone with murder. Meanwhile Isa is befriended by his next-door neighbour Meryem (Başak Köklükaya), a charming young woman who lives with her children and abusive husband. Soon Isa falls in love with Meryem and cannot bear overhearing her screams and cries as she suffers at the hands of her husband every night. One day, Meryem asks Isa to kill her husband. Upset by his hesitance, she implies that she

knows he has already killed someone else. When Isa forces her to tell what she knows, Meryem, in a lengthy monologue, confesses that she has been the landlord's mistress for years due to a tacit agreement he had with her husband. She was sexually exploited and abused by both men. On the night that Isa shot the landlord, Meryem explains, she was in his apartment, saw what happened and destroyed all the evidence implicating Isa. Later in the film, it turns out that Meryem actually has a different love, the landlord's son, and she manipulates Isa to get rid of her husband.

The intricate story of *Third Page* consists of many layers. The plot clearly echoes the film noir genre, with a femme fatale at its centre and a deceived man who falls into a trap when trying to help an attractive and mysterious woman. This odd adoption of the noir genre into an unlikely social context becomes further complicated by the religious overtones produced by the names of the main characters. Isa and Meryem, in Turkish, are proper names denoting Christ and the Virgin Mary. Giving such culturally loaded names to the characters involved in an intricate plot of murder and adultery, the film foregrounds existential questions about fate, responsibility and sin, the favourite themes of Demirkubuz, a director deeply influenced by Dostoyevsky.[25] What is more significant for our discussion here, however, are the self-referential allusions and the sense of repetition in *Third Page*.

25 Ibid.

Prison is one of the recurring motifs in Demirkubuz's cinema. It appears in his films, however, not so much as a physical space but as a metaphor for the way that the characters perceive the space that they inhabit. Demirkubuz's 1996 film *Masumiyet/Innocence*, for example, opens in a prison where the main character, an inmate who has just completed his sentence, tries to explain why he does not want to be released but to spend the rest of his life at the prison. The opening sequence, though it supposedly takes place in the actual space of the prison, does not contain any visual signifiers of imprisonment such as bars or cells. When the main character steps into the outside world, however, he is repeatedly portrayed behind bars or within cell-like rooms. The same trope is repeated in Demirkubuz's 2000 film *Yazgı/Fate*, in which the main character, although convicted for a crime that he did not commit, does not care about proving his innocence since he feels that there is no difference between prison and the outside world.

In *Third Page*, the trope of prison arises in relation to the representation of home. Stripped of all of its romantic connotations, home is represented in the film as a place of confinement, a prison that houses horrific acts of violence. Again and again, Meryem refers to her basement apartment as a wretched place of imprisonment. Seeing herself as someone entangled in poverty and abuse, she is totally disillusioned with her life. She perceives the physical space of her basement flat as the materialization of the harsh realities that make her life a prison. When asked to make a choice between the two men abusing her, she explains she would choose the landlord since his

apartment is larger and more comfortable than her husband's basement flat. At the end of the film, when Isa finds her in the apartment of her secret lover, the landlord's son, she emphasizes that men do not make much difference, but what matters now is that she lives in a much better place.

Home is quite directly associated with horror in *Third Page*. Though Meryem's small basement apartment looks rather normal and ordinary, there is something unmistakably eerie about it. This eerie element does not so much arise from the violence that openly goes on in the house, but the way that it is normalized and rendered invisible. Although all the tenants know of the horrific events that take place in the flat, they tend to behave as if nothing has happened. Neither the bruises on Meryem's face nor her screams seem to be noticed by anyone. Everyone in the film is not only complicit in violence, but also capable of inflicting it. Talking about the details of the murder plan that she concocts for her husband, for example, Meryem sounds like a housewife giving a recipe. When Isa hesitates, she calmly says she would not mind doing a dirty job like slashing the man's face – horror turns into a domestic affair.

What creates the dark and deeply pessimistic tone of Demirkubuz's cinema is the sense of compulsive repetition in his films, which creates the impression that characters are stuck in a labyrinth from which they cannot possibly escape. In a confined world where there seems to be no way out, everything perpetually replicates itself. All the relations are the same; time and again, similar situations occur between different people. Even when the characters attempt to do things differently, they always end up in the same vicious circle. No matter how hard they try to make a difference, everything remains the same.

The uncanny feeling, Freud explains, is related also to the idea of doubling that may occur through the recurrence of similar situations, things and events. An involuntary return to the same situation results in a feeling of helplessness and a sense of the uncanny. A recurrent theme in dreams, for example, is when one is lost in a forest or in the mist and every endeavour brings you back to the same spot. 'It is only this factor of involuntary repetition', Freud writes, 'which surrounds with an uncanny atmosphere what would otherwise be innocent enough, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of chance only'.[26]

The sense of compulsive repetition in and across Demirkubuz's films can be said to create an abyss that fosters an uncanny sensation. Characters seem to *know* that their every endeavour will bring them back to the same spot. The claustrophobic structure of the mise-en-scene further contributes to a sense of involuntary repetition. All spaces resemble one another. The houses depicted in the films are designed to create a sense of uniformity and repetition. Demirkubuz's cinema, in this regard, can perhaps be described as a horror cinema undercover.

26 Freud, 'The uncanny', p. 144.

What makes his films disturbing is the way that horror is turned into something so banal and ordinary that it is no longer recognized as such.

As opposed to the popular nostalgia films of the last decade which focus on situations where home is threatened from outside, the films by Ceylan and Demirkubuz focus on situations where home is challenged from within. 'We can always defend ourselves or even rebuild after the home has been attacked from outside', Nikos Papastergiadis writes, 'but how do you deal with the slow but determined process of implosion? What happens when our sense of home is filled with trauma?'[27] The cinema of Ceylan and Demirkubuz seems to describe this slow, but determined process of implosion.

27 Nikos Papastergiadis, *Dialogues in the Diasporas: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1998), p. 3.

Dissonant voices

In the films of Ceylan and Demirkubuz, sound is not used to complement the image and enhance the illusion of reality, but instead as a dissonant element which disorients the audience and serves to problematize the possibility of retaining a smooth sense of belonging and identity. Film theory maintains that the rule of synchronization, the smooth alignment of the human form with the human voice, is central to mainstream narrative cinema. The conventions of sound reproduction, according to Mary Ann Doane, together with classical techniques of invisible editing and narrative transparency, work to create the illusion of a unified source of audiovisual information.[28] In this way, the text demonstrates a sense of self-sufficiency in which images and sounds seem to be generated internally by the fictional world of the film, and not constructed externally. In a similar vein, Kaja Silverman explains how the sonic regime of dominant cinema contains the human voice within the fiction of diegesis.[29] This is accomplished through the use of synchronization 'which anchors sounds to an immediately visible source, and which focuses attention upon the human voice and its discursive capabilities'.[30] Synchronization, in this context, just like the shot/reverse-shot formation, helps to suture the spectator to the story and direct attention away from the site of cinematic production.

28 Mary Ann Doane, 'The voice in cinema: the articulation of body and space', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods Volume II: an Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 565–75.

29 Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: the Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 45.

30 Ibid., p. 45.

The smooth alignment of sound and image also fosters the reality effect that the mainstream cinema seeks to create. The voice serves as a guarantor of the authenticity and the presence of the person that it belongs to. The body, in other words, is assumed to 'house' the inner truth (the soul) of the subject which finds its expression through the voice. The voice coming out of the body testifies to the authenticity of the speech. As Hamid Naficy points out, there exists 'a unique relationship between voice, interiority and identity', since speech and voice are typically associated with proximity and presence.[31] For that reason, according to Naficy, the use of nonalignment of speaker and voice would be a counter-hegemonic cinematic strategy that serves to complicate the notions of belonging and identity.

31 Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, p. 121.

In Ceylan's cinema, sound is transformed into a dissonant element mostly as a result of the insertion of multiple layers of reality into the narrative. Asking 'real' people (his parents and relatives) to act themselves, Ceylan not only creates an odd sense of intimacy with 'reality' in his films, but he also subjects everything to a double-erasure by constantly disclosing the performative aspect of what is presumed to be 'real'. In *Clouds of May*, there are several interesting instances illustrating how the fine line between 'being oneself' and 'acting oneself' is relentlessly blurred by Ceylan. Towards the end of the film, for example, when Muzaffer finally manages to convince his reluctant parents to play the elderly couple in his film, the entire family goes to the small forest for an afternoon shoot. (The scene that they shoot turns out to be a segment of the final sequence of *The Small Town* in which family members spend an evening together in the forest cultivated by the father.) During the shoot, Muzaffer is positioned behind the camera while his assistant Sadık arranges lighting with a reflector and Saffet acts as prompt. The father is positioned in front of the camera, seated under a large tree. After the 'action' command from Muzaffer, the camera runs and the father repeats the lines, prompted by Saffet: 'Well ... / Here I am. / Now I earn my living as a farmer. / What difference does it make? / Nothing matters. / But, then, neither do I want to die. / If God allows, I want to live for at least another twenty years.' An external voice (spoken by Sadık) asks: 'Is it raining?' The father looks up and replies by following the lines prompted by Saffet again: 'What? / Is it raining? / I don't think so.' After the shooting, Muzaffer warns his father to be more careful and not to be late in looking up to see whether it is raining. He complains that his father's acting is not good enough. The scene is repeated. This time, however, Muzaffer becomes even more upset. He accuses his father of making long pauses between the lines. He reminds him that ten million Turkish liras is wasted in each shoot. The father takes this warning quite seriously since he is daunted by the amount of money being spent and promises to be more careful. Muzaffer scolds others as well. He alerts Saffet not to give long pauses in prompting. After a small family squabble, they once again begin filming. This time, however, Saffet reads the script so fast that the father cannot follow. Muzaffer yells at Saffet. The father gets upset about the loss of another ten million liras. Muzaffer alerts everyone once again to be more careful and the scene is repeated. Everything seems to go all right this time; the father completes his lines correctly. At the end, however, when the external voice asks 'is it raining?', the father looks up, and instead of saying his lines, keeps looking up silently. Muzaffer loses his temper and starts yelling at his father: 'What happened this time father? Why didn't you say your lines?' Still looking up at the tree, the father slowly stands up without saying anything. When the camera shows where he is looking, it becomes clear that there is a red mark on the tree indicating that it has been confiscated by the authorities. It turns out that while the family

Muzaffer (Muzaffer Özdemir) films Saffet (Mehmet Emin Toprak) in *Clouds of May* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 1999)

were away filming for the last couple of days, the authorities came in and marked the entire forest for confiscation.

The ironic tone of this scene arises from the awkwardness of the situation that it depicts. Filmmaking, an activity usually associated with intellectual and artistic production, is transformed into a highly domesticated and humble practice here. An ordinary elderly man, preoccupied by some very concrete problems in his real life, is made by his son to act in a movie, a job that he perceives not only as an unnecessary disruption, but also as trivial and ridiculous. The irony also arises from the bizarre condition of 'acting oneself'. Muzaffer asks his father to be 'natural', to be just like himself. This seemingly easy task, however, proves to be quite tricky in practice, as the father seems to be incapable of giving a 'natural' performance as himself. Having said that, as we watch the scene we also know that what is presented as an unsuccessful performance is already a successful one, because the father is actually supposed to give a performance of failing to perform himself. In other words, what appears to be 'natural' in the scene, the father's failure in performing himself, is already a successful performance. Different layers of reality in the scene are made manifest by the dissociation of voice and person. The words that actually belong to the father are prompted by an external voice. Such a dissociation of voice and person serves to destabilize the assumptions about having a smooth and self-integrated identity. As the unity of the body and the voice is interrupted, self-revelation becomes something dictated from outside.

Sound is transformed into a dissonant element in *Third Page* in a less playful and more disorienting way. As I demonstrated above, *Third Page*, like Demirkubuz's other films, is dominated by an exceedingly claustrophobic visual atmosphere. Most scenes in the film are shot in barely lit, gloomy interiors. The intense sense of claustrophobia, however, is not solely generated by mise-en-scene, but more effectively by the use of sound. Almost all the scenes in *Third Page* are dominated by a loud and annoying background noise. In the opening sequence of the film, as we see Isa brutally beaten up by the gang leader, we hear in the background the loud voice of a television sports commentator describing a football game. In the following scene, Isa goes to try to look for some money at the studio where he works. As he desperately tries to explain the situation to his rude and ignorant boss, in the background we see and hear the shooting of a mafia murder scene for a television drama. When Isa first goes to Meryem's apartment, they chat

a little at the breakfast table while a loud debate is going on in a daytime television talk show in the background. Later in the film, Isa cannot get any sleep at nights since he is forced to listen to the violent arguments between Meryem and her husband. Even the quietest scenes of *Third Page* include the sound of either television or heavy traffic in the background.

The characters' experience of entrapment and captivity in *Third Page*, then, is emphasized by the claustrophobic atmosphere created by the ubiquitous presence of sound in the film. The pervasive sense of helplessness and confinement that the film conveys arises from the condition of being continuously surrounded by fragments of absurd and violent pieces of discourse. The characters are constantly under surveillance, constantly being terrorized. They cannot have a single quiet moment to reflect upon their own condition. Their own voices are swallowed up by the fragments of senseless discourse surrounding them. Apart from this constant disruptive effect of sound, there is a particular instance in *Third Page* in which the transformation of discourse into an alien and invading element is illustrated in a particularly revealing way. This is Meryem's confession scene.

Monologue is a dominant narrative element in Demirkubuz's cinema. In all of his films, the flow of events is interrupted at a certain point by a lengthy confessional monologue in which some dark secrets are revealed. Monologue scenes usually represent some kind of a halt in the story that momentarily immobilizes the narrative progress. The mise-en-scene employed – the characters typically positioned side by side in a medium-shot facing the camera and not each other – creates the impression that the confessing character does not speak to another character in the diegesis but directly addresses the audience. The lengthy monologue scene in *Third Page* creates such an effect. Throughout this scene, which lasts approximately six minutes, Meryem is depicted in a series of medium closeup shots, narrating her story in a somewhat monotonous way with her eyes fixed on a point on the floor. Although she cries as she speaks, her tone of voice is distant and blank.

Meryem's (Basak Köklükaya) monologue in *Third Page* (Zeki Demirkubuz, 2000).

At several points during the monologue, the unity between the voice and the image is interrupted when Meryem stops talking and just cries, but we continue to hear her voice over the image. Then, after a cut, we see her talking again in another medium closeup shot taken from a different angle.

Needless to say, such an interruption creates a disorienting effect on the audience. Creating a distance between the voice and the body, it takes attention away from the content of the things being said to the externality of discourse itself. The question is no longer what she is saying, but how she is positioned in relation to the discourse to which she gives voice. Confession is no longer what it is normally taken to mean, that is, the revelation of truth out of the body. Contrary to the conventional understanding of speech as an indicator of self-presence and self-expression, in Meryem's monologue speech does not naturally come out of the body, but appears to be an alien presence occupying the body.

The films by Ceylan and Demirkubuz illustrate speech situations in which the subject is alienated from the meanings produced by her/his own voice. The authenticity of speech is destroyed in the sense that it no longer testifies to the inner truth of the subject producing it. Voice, in other words, can no longer be taken as a reflection of the inner truth of the subject. The distance between the voice and the body designates a problem of belonging and identity in the sense that the voice is no longer understood as an expression of something coming from within the subject, but is external to it. In this way, the films expose the compulsory as well as the performative side of belonging.

Conclusion

Commenting on recent Iranian cinema, Hamid Dabashi observes that those Iranian films popular inside the country often address timely issues, whereas the internationally acclaimed films by Iranian directors such as Abbas Kiarostami and Mohsen Makmalbaf tend to be preoccupied with more abstract and philosophical problems.[32] On the basis of this observation, Dabashi reassesses the relationship between film and politics and argues that the fact that popular Iranian films address timely issues does not necessarily make them more political. 'By virtue of being timely, they are limited in their ability to imagine things otherwise than they are. They are too factually realistic to be effectively real. They are trapped in the surface of the real and can never bypass the immediacy of experience.'[33] By not being timely, according to Dabashi, the films by internationally acclaimed Iranian directors are much more relevant. Following a similar line of argument, I would like to suggest that in spite of their ostensibly non-political content, the films by Ceylan and Demirkubuz have much political relevance because of their relentless interrogation of the question of 'belonging'. Popular nostalgia films of the new Turkish cinema,

32 Hamid Dabashi, *Close-Up Iranian Cinema: Past, Present and Future* (London: Verso, 2001).

33 Ibid., p. 277.

focusing on situations where 'home' is threatened from outside, end up rescuing an imaginary sense of 'home' as a site of integrity and virtue. Instead of yearning for a smooth sense of belonging, the cinemas of Ceylan and Demirkubuz direct attention to situations where home is challenged from within and expose the paradoxical side of 'belonging'. 'Every belonging to a society', Slavoj Žižek writes, 'involves a paradoxical point at which the subject is ordered to embrace freely, as the result of his choice, what is anyway imposed on him (we must all love our country, our parents ...)'.[34] In post-1980 Turkish society, where hackneyed nationalist discourses accompany aggressive neoliberal policies, Ceylan and Demirkubuz disclose that what appears to be natural and voluntary in relation to belonging is indeed compulsory and performative. The politics of their films is shaped around the suggestion that having an authentic, self-same voice expressing the inner truth of the subject is a myth, just like the fantasy of having a smooth sense of belonging to a home, community and homeland.

34 Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York, NY: Verso, 1997), p. 75.

Room for experiment: gallery films and vertical time from Maya Deren to Eija Liisa Ahtila

CATHERINE FOWLER

Introduction – cinema everywhere

In a recent essay in *Vertigo*, Chris Dercon recalls André Bazin's infamous phrase 'Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?' (What is cinema?), then suggests that what now seems more pressing is the question: 'Où est le cinéma?' (Where is cinema?).[1] After years of being fixed onto celluloid, gripped by the teeth of the film projector, and confined to the single screen of the cinema auditorium, the moving image has escaped. No longer purely celluloid, no longer solely projected, present on multiple screens and in a variety of spaces, 'cinema', as Dercon himself implies, is everywhere.

Though we might find the moving image projected onto buildings (for example the work of the Public Art Development Trust, London), up in the sky (some of Tony Oursler's work) and as part of the landscape (*Park – a Plan for Escape* made by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster for Documenta 2002), it is its use by artist filmmakers in the gallery from the 1990s onwards that concerns me here.[2] My discussion of my chosen works pivots on two assumptions. The first is that they might be said to constitute a third layer of artist filmmaking as outlined by Chris Dercon,[3] including 'film or video pieces by young artists'. I would consider here such names as Steve McQueen, Sherin Neshat, Pierre Huyghe, Douglas Gordon, Mark Lewis, Stan Douglas, Eija Liisa Ahtila or Sam Taylor-Wood, and I will call their work 'gallery films'. My second assumption is that cinema should be seen as the back-story

1 Chris Dercon, 'Gleaning the future – from the gallery floor', *Vertigo*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2002), pp. 3–5.

2 The question of why the artist filmmakers referred to here have turned to the gallery space as site of exhibition is obviously one to be investigated, though not in this essay. Isaac Julien has suggested: 'In a sense, the move into the museum space is also about the looking for a space and the recognition that perhaps the notion of Independent film somehow competing with global models (like Hollywood) couldn't work. Devin Anthony Orgeron and Marsha Gabrielle Orgeron, 'Interventions: an interview with Isaac Julien', *Coil*, nos 9/10 (2000).

3 The first layer consisting of 'Kenneth Anger, Bruce Connor, Maya Deren, Paul Sharits and Michael Snow'; the second being 'the video installations of the artistic avant garde, of Nauman, Hill and Viola'. Dercon, 'Gleaning the future'.

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to gallery films, an assumption that derives from the uneasy attitude frequently shown to such work by film theory and criticism. For evidence I can point to three sources. First, the recent publication of *The Undercut Reader* provided the occasion for Barry Schwabsky to reflect on the art/film pairing and to find that:

> Reading back through ... *Undercut*, it is striking ... how little reflection there is either on the broad relations between film and either the idea of (fine) art or its institutions or on the specific differences between the typical situations of public display in the two fields – gallery presentation and theatrical presentation. Of course this mirrors the reciprocal disinterest of the art world in experimental film, an interest that is equally surprising in both cases, given previous moments of rapprochement between them.[4]

Second, in a review of A.L. Rees's *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, Felicity Sparrow observes:

> the spread of video installations has generated much hype but little informed criticism specific to the moving image; an authoritative critical analysis of the contemporary use of film and video by artists in galleries ... is certainly needed.[5]

And third, film and video maker and installation artist Isaac Julien has asserted: 'there is a huge gap in criticism of films that exist in the cinematic context and the art world; the development between those film and video works and critical reflection is extremely limited'.[6] These observations suggest that the very critical spaces in which detailed analysis of the cinema/gallery relationship might have been undertaken have been those in which it was largely ignored. However despite the lack of a sustained reflection on such a relationship, there have been pockets of engagement.[7] Crucially, the history of the projected image's place in the gallery space was explored by Chrissie Iles in her exhibition (and accompanying publication) created at the Whitney Museum in 2001: 'Into the Light: the Projected Image in American Art 1964–1977'.[8] Iles contemplates the debt that projected images in this period owed to conceptual artists such as Duchamp, and concludes that in his works *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* and *To be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour)* 'transparent surfaces suggest projection as well as the fourth dimension of time.'[9]

Iles's thoughtful and significant exhibition was preceded by 'Cinema Cinema – Contemporary Art and the Cinematic Experience' at the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Rather than the historical survey provided by Iles, here there was a themed selection of works chosen because of their relation to the cinema as mass, spectacular, pervading influence.[10] In the accompanying catalogue, the curators suggest that the featured artists work in two different ways: first, 'the incorporation of cinematographic techniques into other media' such as

4 Barry Schwabsky, 'Revisitations: art, film, video: separation or synthesis?', in Nina Danino and Michael Mazière (eds), *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists' Film and Video* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), pp. 1–4.

5 Felicity Sparrow, 'A review of A.L. Rees's *History of Experimental Film*', *Filmwaves*, no. 9 (Summer, 1999), pp. 60–61.

6 Orgeron, 'Intervention: an interview with Isaac Julien', n.p.

7 Also of significance would be the exhibition 'When Worlds Collide' at the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 1998, and the subsequent publication by Tanya Leighton and Pavel Büchler (eds), *Saving the Image: Art after Film* (Glasgow: CCA/Manchester Metropolitan Museum, 2003).

8 Chrissie Iles, *Into the Light: the Projected Image in American Art 1964–1977* (New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001).

9 Ibid., p. 35.

10 Jan Guldemond, 'Cinema cinema: contemporary art and the cinematic experience', in *Cinema Cinema: Contemporary Art and the Cinematic Experience* (Rotterdam: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, 1999).

photography and installations (Eija Liisa Ahtila, whose films show in split, triple and multiple screens, Fiona Banner with her cinema screen-sized scribblings based on films, and Sharon Lockhart, whose photographs seem to be indexical cinematic moments while her films investigate stillness); second, the 'analy[sis] manipula[tion] and restructur[ing] of existing cinematic material'[11] (Julie Becker, Pierre Bismuth, Christopher Draeger, Christopher Girardet, Douglas Gordon, Pierre Huyghe, Joachim Koester, Mark Lewis).

11 Ibid.

Both the exhibitions and publications mentioned above are important for the ways in which they group together work that has taken the moving image into gallery space and, as both catalogues suggest, thereby forced a reexamination of the boundaries between moving and still images, cinematic apparatus and gallery space. The fact that this criticism has been undertaken *alongside* the exhibition of the work itself, also suggests the difficulty of talking about these pieces without at the same time seeing them in the gallery space. Whilst both exhibitions had this advantage, curiously the focus of each is divided between either the inside (film in 'Cinema Cinema') or outside (gallery in 'Into the Light') of the frame; consequently neither investigates the continuum between in-frame and out-of-frame. This is in fact a standard omission: the body of work on gallery films has analyzed their content as if they were cinema films, whilst any discussion of screens in space has been reserved for more sculptural gallery films, such as Doug Aitken's *New Ocean* at the Serpentine Gallery.[12] My work in this essay builds on this omission as I am interested in examining the continuum between the in-frame (the content of the image and issues of film style) and the out-of-frame (the space within which that image is placed to be viewed), with the aim of exploring how context might affect both the content of the images and the viewing experience.

12 *Doug Aitken (New Ocean)* exhibition catalogue (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2000).

In the wider context of moving image gallery work (whether projected as film, DVD or video, or on single, double or multi-screen setups), once the filter of film history is applied, connections to the concerns of earlier cinema experiments swiftly emerge. Examples include:

structuralist/materialist films' foregrounding of the projector, camera, lens and film material (Tacita Dean, *Fernsehturm* [2001] and *Disappearance at Sea* [1996]);

a 'primitive cinema' preoccupation with the difference between stillness and movement (Douglas Gordon, *24 Hour Psycho* [1993], Bill Viola, *Quintet of the Astonished* [2000]);

an extension of expanded cinema's use of strategies such as repetition, and more than one screen, to challenge the dominance of the cause and effect, linear narrative paradigm (Steve McQueen, *Deadpan* [1997], Isaac Julien, *Long Road to Mazatalan* [1999]).

These three examples should already suggest the ripeness of recent moving-image gallery work for an analysis of its experiment with, and

transformation of, film language that I do not have the space for here.[13] Instead, I will use my focus on the continuum of in-frame and out-of-frame to suggest one way in which gallery films might contribute to advances in film theory and practice, through their connection to concepts introduced in the 1940s by Maya Deren.

Deren's concept of 'vertical time' will be revisited in the light of recent gallery films. My analysis will be largely formalist and should be taken to represent an initial investigation into the subject. I will introduce issues such as how a different exhibition space might provide an alternative viewing experience, and how the gallery context, gallery films and the diptych form might allow us to rethink linear time and the potential of editing operating in space as well as in time. Through this discussion I hope to open the way for an embedding of this formalist work into more involved discussions of time (linear, vertical, subjective) and space in cinema (in-frame, out-of-frame, onscreen and offscreen, and embodied), for example, using the work of Deleuze, Bergson, Manovich and Bellour,[14] and also to show that though they may have chosen a different room for their experiment, gallery films should not be expelled from film theory's frame, since their project is often to explore and expand our understanding of what cinema is and could be.

Cinema and the vertical

In her films and her writing Deren's project seems to entail a similar questioning of cinema to that of Bazin. However, whereas Bazin's grand project was to pin down 'the evolution of the language of cinema', Deren was more concerned with what cinema 'could be' – its future potential. Deren's most comprehensive account of her theories is contained in her long essay: 'An anagram of ideas of art, form and film',[15] recently described by Bill Nichols as: 'one of the most significant reflections on the nature and responsibilities of art and film yet written'.[16] However, my focus in this essay will be on a statement she made at a Cinema 16 Symposium on 'poetry and the film' (which included as invited speakers Dylan Thomas and Arthur Miller).[17] Here Deren elaborates on what form poetry in film might take:

> The distinction of poetry is its construction ... and the poetic construct arises from the fact, if you will, that it is a 'vertical' investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications of the moment and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned, in a sense, not with what is occurring but with what it feels like or what it means ... it may also include action, but its attack is what I would call the vertical attack ... in contrast to the horizontal attack of dram ... In what is called a horizontal development the logic is a logic of actions. In a vertical development it is a logic of a central emotion or idea that attracts to itself even

13 For more discussion see *Filmwaves*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2004), section 'Art in-sight', especially: Catherine Fowler, 'Double visions, double frames', pp. 5–7; Maeve Connolly, 'The double space of Willie Doherty's *Re-run*'; Maria Walsh, 'An ethics of looking: Marine Hugonier's *Ariana* and Tacita Dean's *Boots*'.

14 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement Image* (London: Athlone, 1989), and *Cinema 2: the Time Image* (London, Athlone, 1992); Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1908), trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991); Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Raymond Bellour, *L'entre-images, photo, cinéma, vidéo* (Paris: France la Différence, 1990), and *L'entre-images 2, Mots, Images* (Paris: France la Différence, 1999).

15 Maya Deren 'An anagram of ideas on art, form and film' (1946), in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 52.

16 Ibid.

17 Amos Vogel, 'Poetry and film: a symposium with Maya Deren, Arthur Miller, Dylan Thomas, Parker Tyler. Chairman William Maas', in P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *Film Culture: an Anthology* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2001).

disparate images, which contain that central core, which they have in common.[18]

Critics have picked up on Deren's notion of the 'vertical investigation', that does not move on but moves back and around, as an alternative to the conventional 'horizontal attack' that is linear and consecutive, operates through cause and effect and strives for a conclusion. This halting of linear time in order to expand a moment is clearly explored in Deren's first trilogy of films. *Meshes in the Afternoon*, *At Land* and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945) are each concerned with the ways in which film grammar can be used to suggest the vertical investigation she describes. Importantly, the structure of Deren's trilogy foregrounds moments of 'recognition', explained by her as follows:

> As we watch a film, the continuous act of recognition in which we are involved is like a strip of memory unrolling beneath the images of the film itself, to form the invisible underlayer of an implicit double exposure.[19]

***Meshes in the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1945).**

Each part of Deren's trilogy contains moments in which, although a 'story' seems to have been progressing, we are suddenly halted by the realization that time and space are no longer continuous and instead there is a repetition with a difference of something experienced earlier, or an edit to suggest a slippage in time or space. Examples include: *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, in which choreographed bodies are frozen in one space to then be edited magically into another, creating a continuity of movement among a breaking down of time and space; *At Land*, in which simultaneity is suggested towards the end, when a scene of Deren on a beach with two women is then intercut with scenes from earlier in the film; and *Meshes in the Afternoon*, which is structured through a fivefold repetition of an event in which four times a woman (Deren) and the fifth time a man (Alexander Hammid) leave a path to enter a house. At such moments the double exposure of the linear cinematic experience is foregrounded and the spectator is forced to confront the passing of time within which she/he is caught.

These films are successful in bearing out Deren's notion of 'a vertical investigation', a time of meanwhile, which asks us to stay with, and think around, an event. However the amount of time we can stay is inevitably limited by the imperative of the cinema film to keep moving from A to B. Therefore, whilst Deren may have used editing and mise-en-scene to liberate her in-frame images from a horizontal development, the cinema space surrounding them could be said to thwart some of the associations, comparison, and sense of simultaneity that she wishes to invite, whilst sustaining the act of memory involved in her 'double exposure' and the 'what happens next' of the cinema auditorium's linear time frame.

18 Ibid.

19 'Cinematography: the creative use of reality', *Daedalus* (Winter 1960), pp. 154–5.

The gallery and the vertical

[The] fundamental search for cinematic forms which do not conform to a linear narrative structure and resolution is the main characteristic which differentiates experimental film from mainstream cinema and is ultimately its major claim to radical intervention at all levels – aesthetic, ideological and political.
Malcolm Le Grice.[20]

20 Malcolm Le Grice, 'A non-linear tradition: experimental film and digital cinema', in *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), pp. 289–96.

As Le Grice suggests, avant-garde practitioners since Deren have placed her non-linear exploration at the heart of their work. What the exhibition of films in gallery space immediately offers is a solution to the problems of the linear experience of the cinema auditorium. The removal of such normal cinema conditions as a set beginning and end to the programme, a strict seating plan, and a single autonomous screen allows an experience that extends from the linear towards collage, comparison, simultaneity, reinforcement and opposition. The rest of this essay explores how a selection of gallery films combine form and content to approach an even stronger sense of the 'vertical investigation' that Deren called for. I will begin with a survey of some common strategies used, before focusing on some key works, specifically Ahtila's *Consolation Service* (1999).

Typically, gallery films situate themselves in relation to the cinema and cinema films: they are generally shown on a screen or screens (though, as I will discuss, the 'frame' is treated very differently), they use filmic codes and conventions such as narrative, deep focus, long take and editing, and in terms of content many have copied cinema's mode of production (see the work of Lewis, or Taylor Wood's *Third Party* [1999]), or quoted from, or re-interpreted images from, film history (see Huyghe, *Remake* [1995], Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* and McQueen's *Deadpan*). A knowledge of cinema, the expectations it sets up, its mode of spectatorship and ways of making meaning is then a prerequisite to gallery films, which play with, reflect upon and challenge that knowledge.

Another obvious development in the gallery space is the implied activity of the visitor, who can perambulate, choose when to enter or exit, where to stand, sit or walk, and even (with multi-screen work) where to look. The differences this brings to the viewing experience are amply demonstrated in Michael Snow's video installation *That/Cela/Dat* (2001), which was specially produced for an exhibition in Brussels and intended as the follow-up to the film *So is This* (1986). Both works consist of single words appearing one by one on a coloured screen (blue and black respectively) forcing us into an act of anticipatory reading. The interest for this paper is the fact that, when taken together, the works can be used to comment on several differences between film in the cinema and film/video/DVD in the gallery space. First, on the material differences of film and video projection, *So is This* tells us:

In / this / film / lighting / is / writing/ (Japanese?) / This / is / white / light, / it / contains / all / the / colours.
This / was / handwritten / then / it / was/ typeset / then / filmed / and / now / it's / light / reading. / Pause. / This / is / a / shot / in / the / dark.

While *That* begins with the words:

This / is / electronic / light / projected / on / this.

Both works also comment on their expected viewers, in the first they are static and seated and in the second, perambulating and momentary spectators. In *So is This*:

The / decision / has / been / made / to / concentrate / on / the / distinctive / capacity / of / film / to / structure / time ... This / is / a / screen / in / the / night. / But / look / at / the / bright / side / of / it: / sharing! / When / was / the / last / time / you / and / your / neighbour / read / together? / This / is / communal / reading, / it's / Group / Lit!

and in *That*:

Some / of / you / are / not / looking / at / this. / That's / OK. / Some / are. / Thanks / ... at / this / time / many / activities / are / taking / place / simultaneously / here. / There / is / much / to / 'look / at. / The / author / is / trying / to / arouse / your / interest, / to / attract / your / attention, / to / ask / you / to / consider / this / exclusively / for / a / few / minutes / ... However / talk / or / walk / if / you / want / Don't / feel / that / you / must / watch / this, / wow, / look / at / that / beautiful / girl! /

The differences as highlighted in Snow's two works have led some to argue that meaning cannot be made in the same way by the fleeting gallery experience. Le Grice states:

> I have ... been tempted by gallery installation since the multi-projection films. However I have largely rejected this form because of the transience of the viewers' engagement and consequent lack of depth in time-based art in the gallery. This lack of sustained attention and duration veers work towards concept and idea rather than engaged experience.[21]

21 Malcolm Le Grice, 'Improvising time and image', *Filmwaves*, no. 14 (2001), pp. 15–19.

In the gallery films discussed here, my focus will largely be upon formal issues: how meaning is made across screens and through an interaction of in-frame and out-of-frame. Leaving aside the content as I do, my analysis will still assume that engagement is invited and achieved and context is merely foregrounded because it is our way into content. Such a view is echoed in some reviews of gallery film. Thus in writing on Tacita Dean's films, Sparrow asserts:

> Like many contemporary artists using film, Dean's work is underwhelming when seen in a cinema auditorium yet absorbing for the gallery visitor – which is not to denigrate the films, merely to point out that they are suited to certain contexts.[22]

22 Felicity Sparrow, 'Light illusions: artists and cinema, film-makers and galleries', *Vertigo*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2001), pp. 24–6.

and similarly Catherine Elwes states:

> Artists like Michael Mazière, Shirin Neshat and Douglas Gordon have created a new cinematic space within the gallery. No longer constrained by cinema schedules and a fixed viewing position, spectators are now free to determine the length of exposure to the images and can enter into a more physical and more intimate exchange with the work.[23]

23 Catherine Elwes, 'Starting a conversation about ... artists' film, video and installation', *Filmwaves*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2001), pp. 46–7.

This mention of the 'physical' exchange is of particular importance to my discussion, for what becomes apparent when comparing many of the works cited so far is that the in-frame is treated very differently in the gallery space, since even if a gallery film appears to be telling a story, there will often be an emphasis on other ways of making meaning and other experiences. I will compare this to Deren's idea of the vertical as both 'what is occuring' and 'what it feels like or what it means'.[24]

24 Deren, in Vogel, 'Poetry and film'.

Though the exhibition space offered in the gallery is less prone to illusionism, passivity and the linear, artist filmmakers have still chosen some of the forms of attack adopted by alternative filmmakers before them, such as breaking the frame, invoking the process of making the work, using repetition and looping to avoid the dramatic structure, and manipulating time through freeze-frames and slow motion. This familiar treatment of the in-frame is, however, combined with an attention to the out-of-frame, with the screen referring to the space around it.

As suggested above there is much that is the same in gallery films and in alternative cinema, and this provides an aesthetic, conceptual, critical and theoretical continuity to my project. There is also, though, much that is different: the semiotics of the gallery space, our expectations upon entering, the size, shape, placement and number of screens, how we are invited to look and what we are being asked to do. Therefore, despite my assertion that I will offer a combined reading of in-frame and out-of-frame, initially we need to examine more closely the semiotics of the gallery space.

Characterized as a white cube rather than a black box, this space does away with the illusionist confines of the cinema auditorium to invite a variety of reactions to its moving images. Whilst it would be easy to compare gallery films with the paintings that are the most frequent form of art found in gallery spaces, in doing this one would be ignoring the transformation of the gallery that modern and postmodern artists have undertaken. For example, Brian O'Doherty has written on the transformation of the white cube:

> From the '20s to the '70s, the gallery has a history as distinct as that of the art shown in it. No longer confined to a zone around the artwork, and impregnated now with the memory of art, the new space pushed gently against its confining box. Gradually, the gallery was infiltrated with consciousness. Its walls became ground; its floor a pedestal, its corners vortices, its ceiling a frozen sky. The white cube became art-in-potency, its enclosed space an alchemical medium. Art became what was deposited therein, removed and regularly replaced. Is the empty gallery, now full of that elastic space we can identify with Mind, modernism's greatest invention?[25]

25 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: the Identity of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

The important point to take from O'Doherty is the fact that the gallery space that was to house the moving image in the 1960s was already a self-conscious context that transformed its content. Works such as Anthony Mcall's *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) and Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974) experimented with the new-found dimensions of the space, offering: 'a phenomenological experience of objects in relation to the architectural dimensions of the gallery, turning space into a conceptual realm'.[26] This first displacement of the moving image from black box to white cube is constituted as a kind of Wizard of Oz moment when the lights go up, the mechanics are uncovered and the wizard or artist's role is revealed. Consequently, as Peggy Gale notes: 'the material properties of film and the mechanics of cinema are exposed here in spatial terms'.[27]

26 Iles, *Into the Light.*

27 Peggy Gale, review of 'Into the Light: the Projected Image in American Art 1964–1977, Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC', *Filmwaves*, vol. 1, no. 17 (2002), pp. 9–11.

In-frame out-of-frame

In the gallery films of the 1990s that have brought back fiction, narrative and characters to disguise some of these material qualities, the frame becomes a particularly important boundary. Here gallery films can be distinguished from both cinema films and other forms of art for the ways in which they treat their frames. O'Doherty notes that in '[easel painting] ... the stability of the frame is as necessary as an oxygen tank is to a diver. Its limiting security completely defines the experience within.... There is no suggestion that the space within the picture is continuous with the space on either side of it.'[28] To compare this initially with cinema films' frame we might turn to Bazin, who talks of 'the wide-ranging, centrifugal, off-screen oriented film image', and 'painting with its all-inclusive, centripetal kind of framing'.[29]

28 O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube.*

29 From André Bazin, 'Painting and cinema', in Angela Dalle Vache (ed.), *The Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 221–5, and as paraphrased in Dalle Vache's 'Introduction: unexplored connections in a new territory', in ibid., p. 21.

As we have seen from O'Doherty, the development of modern and postmodern art has challenged the separation of the inside space of the artwork and the outside space of the gallery, insisting on, and indeed making possible, more of an interactive relationship. Gallery films build upon the possibilities offered here in two contradictory ways: first by foregrounding the frame, and thus the edge and the ends of the image; second by connecting the image to the gallery space that

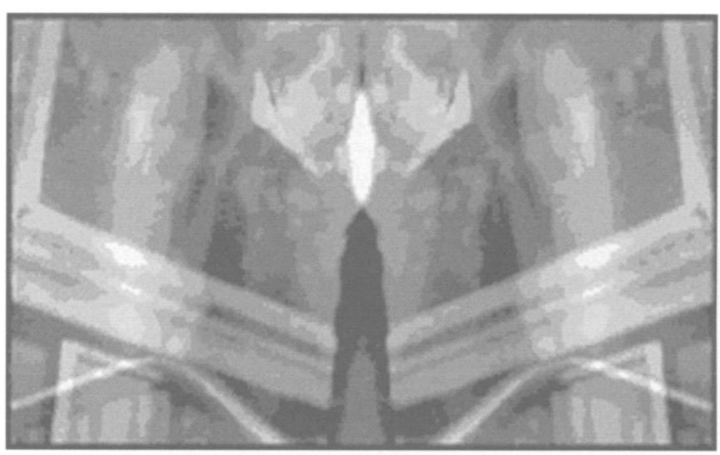
surrounds it, and thus suggesting the spilling over of the image into the viewers' space.

The foregrounding of the frame is a gesture that immediately problematizes the ways in which we as cinema spectators have been used to reading offscreen space. In cinema films, in Bazin's words: 'The screen is not a frame like that of a picture, but a mask which allows us to see a part of the event only'.[30] However, in many gallery films the screen *is* like a picture frame, and in consequence there is an emphasis on the completeness (as opposed to the partiality) of events shown. The foregrounding of the frame has direct implications for how we read screen space. If as gallery viewers we no longer believe that the diegesis extends outside of the frame, we might surmise that framed space is read differently. On one hand, it could be read as if in a painting, centripetally, thus as referring only to itself and not to a fictional world that extends out of frame or to a real world outside of the screening space. On the other hand, once the frame is connected to the space outside it can be read centrifugally, but the extension of the framed space is, once again, not out into the fictional/real world but rather into the gallery space.

30 André Bazin, 'Théatre et cinéma', in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma* (Paris: Cerf, 1959), p. 100.

By briefly exploring examples of centripetal and centrifugal framing we also begin to get a sense of how gallery films build on our understanding of film language as it has developed over the past century. Many works use simple one-shot setups devoid of editing (*Turbulent Rapture* and *Fervour* [Shirin Neshat, 2001], *I Don't Know Why I Love You* [Breda Beban, 2003], *Illuminer* [Steve McQueen, 2001]). Where editing is used, though, in terms of our understanding of film language there are obviously significant differences in the use of continuity devices such as eyeline match and match on action and in our understanding of the potency of offscreen space.

Isaac Julien's *Vagabondia* (2000) borrows from art history, placing its screen on the gallery wall, and then offering us sumptuous images that are arranged along the central axis of the frame to work as



Vagabondia **(Isaac Julien, 2000).**

parallels, mirror images. Our eye is necessarily drawn to the centre of the frame rather than the outside boundary. Consequently we make meaning along the axis in the middle, and the images take their meaning from that central point. This being the case, *Vagabondia* works in some, though not all, of its images like some of the two screen works I will discuss later.

McQueen's early work provides unique examples of images that both draw attention to the frame and connect explicitly with the gallery space. Perhaps the most potent example is *Just Above my Head* (1996). In this and many of his other works (*Bear* [1993], *Five Easy Pieces* [1995]), acute, constructivist-like camera angles frame actions that are chosen with full consciousness of the gallery visitor's own embodied experience.

In *Just Above my Head*, McQueen's camera is held roughly against his chest looking up. The resulting image offered is of the sky and the tip of his nose, eyes and forehead as he walks along and bobs up and down. This frame then fills the whole of the back wall of the gallery. Unlike Julien's *Vagabondia*, which was hung on the wall, filling only a small part of it, *Just Above my Head* completely fills one quarter of the white cube.[31] The spectator is overwhelmed by a massive image, and immediately questions her/his own understanding of spatial properties, of what is up and what is down. Though the camera looks up to McQueen's head, what we see is actually at the bottom of our frame, we therefore have to look down to look up.[32]

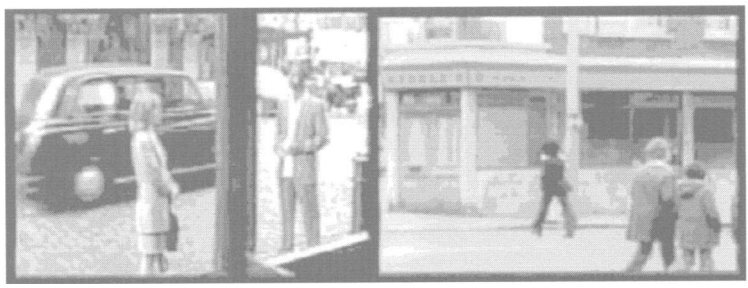
The connection of the image to the gallery space that is found in McQueen's work can be further assessed through a comparison of a cinema film and a gallery film for which knowledge of their exhibition context is an integral part of their structure: John Smith's *Girl Chewing Gum* (1979) and Mark Lewis's *Centrale* (1999).

Both films begin with street scenes and, like Snow's two works discussed earlier, both are reflexive, asking us to think about our position in the cinema or gallery space. *Centrale* opens with a static

31 Or one sixth if one includes floor and ceiling, although when shown at Tate Britain as part of the Turner Prize exhibition there was also a significant spillage of the image onto the highly polished floor.

32 McQueen's work deserves further discussion, but this falls beyond the scope of this paper. See, however, Okwui Enwezor, 'Haptic visions: the films of Steve McQueen', in *Steve McQueen* (London and Zurich: Institute of Contemporary Arts and Kunstahell, 1999), pp. 37–50.

***Just Above my Head* (Steve McQueen, 1996).**



Centrale (Mark Lewis, 1999).

shot looking through a window onto a London side-street. On the left-hand side of the shot stands a woman, on the right-hand side a man, they are separated by a vertical bar that also divides the image in half. Their eyeline and position in the frame seem to imply that they are talking to each other, however strollers in the background of each half of the frame do not appear on the other side. Initially, then, this image makes use of our knowledge of the cinematic codes of eyeline matching and screen direction to provide us with a first glance that is engineered to suggest that both figures are in the same space; it also asks us to stay as we might do in the cinema, and rewards that.

In *Girl Chewing Gum* a similarly static tableau image of day-to-day goings-on in a street is accompanied by the voiceover of a director seemingly 'directing' the action. We assume this because the people in frame seem to operate upon his commands. Thus he says 'Let's have the man in the white boilersuit coming in from the right, stop at the lamp post and fold your arms, now look around you, walk back to the left again and look left and right as you cross the road', and this is followed by exactly what he has just described.

Both these films rely on us taking some time to absorb the opening situations they show us, this period of familiarization is then followed by a moment when we suddenly 'get it' and understand that our initial impression is wrong. With *Centrale*, by the end of the film we realize that the man shown on the right is in reality on the left, while the woman is in reality on the right, and that they actually stand with their backs to each other. Once figured out, then, *Centrale* asks us to mentally rethink the in-frame space, to swap over the direction of its two characters. By contrast, in *Girl Chewing Gum* it becomes evident as the sequence unfolds that the director's commands are actually occuring after the event, in post-production. This realization is partly produced by the length of time for which we are asked to watch and listen, but also by the growing ridiculousness of the instructions – for example on a shot of a clock the voiceover says 'I want the long hand to move at the rate of one revolution every hour, and the short hand to move at the rate of one revolution every twelve hours'. *Girl Chewing Gum* refers us to the production process of cinema and reveals our *manipulation in terms of time* (the director was not actually present when these images were filmed but has made it seem like he was), whilst *Centrale*'s trickery addresses a spectator whose experience of the film is already physical and who is then asked to re-think the image

in physical terms. It refers us directly to the gallery space, and our *manipulation in terms of space.*

Single-screen gallery films can be seen to immediately expand 'what is occuring' on screen by foregrounding the frame and connecting the image to the outside, thus adding a further dimension to the meaning-making process. This is taken even further by multi-screen gallery films. As noted above, much of Deren's representation of the adjacency of 'meanwhile' operates through a system of repetition in time; in addition multi-screen gallery films offer repetitions in space. The distinction between cinema and gallery here may be thought of in terms used by Martha Langford to discuss Snow's work. She quotes Kierkegaard:

> Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward.[33]

There are obvious advantages to a repetition forward rather than a recollection backward: first, because the process is no longer a retrospective act of memory there is more chance that we will notice similarities and differences; second, as a result of this renewed attention to first-time images a comparative experience can take over which removes the emphasis on the horizontal attack – in which we go forwards or go back – and frees us to truly think around, vertically.

33 Martha Langford, 'Repetition/la repetition: Michael Snow and the act of memory', in *Michael Snow Almost Cover to Cover* (Bristol: Black Dog Publishing, 2001), pp. 34–75.

Not next, but next to

The framework offered by the multi-screen gallery films I will analyze here is not that of 'what happens next', in which the main reference points are 'before' and 'after', but one which is governed by a dialogue between images, inviting comparative states such as symmetry, filiation, and alternation and analysis of binaries, opposites or commonalities. The desired effect here is similar to that intended in *Meshes in the Afternoon* in terms of the five repeated entrances into the house, all of which we are invited to compare. However cinema film's comparison in time, in which we have progressively to readjust our memory of what has and is happening, is exchanged for gallery film's comparison in space in which the image remains largely the same, but combinations change.

The strongest evidence for this invited comparative spectatorship is to be found in two-screen installations such as those used by Gordon, Neshat and Ahtila.[34] Gordon's *A Divided Self I and II* (1996) is one of a series of single-screen video works (*Dead Right* [1998], *Left Dead* [1998] and *Hand and Foot (Left) and (Right) Dead* [1998]) that are exhibited in twos, as if to invite a comparison of opposites or of 'doubling, mirroring and reflection'.[35] We can find more substance in Neshat's two-screen installations. *Turbulent* and *Rapture* divide their facing screens between men on one side and women on the other.

34 Another artist to use diptychs in this way is Sam Taylor-Wood. However, her use becomes more complex once one considers her three, four and five-screen pieces and her most complex, *Third Party* (1999). Discussion of her work therefore goes beyond the scope of this paper.

35 *Douglas Gordon: What Have I Done to Deserve This*, exhibition pamphlet, 2003.

Spectatorship becomes a process of spotting the oppositions, as Neshat puts it: 'an empty and a full theatre, the rational and irrational, traditional music and non-traditional music, the communal and the solitary ... nature and culture, rebellion and conformity, the predictable and non-predictable'.[36] This suggests that while the sexes are easily opposed they are also essential to one another for their own meaning. Neshat asserts that the work that followed these two, *Fervour*, 'no longer focuses on "opposites" but on "commonalities" ... men and women are therefore no longer presented on two opposite but on two adjoining screens'.[37] These two screen works invite comparisons with the edit, and a discussion of what it means to juxtapose images not simply in time but also in space. Are we being asked, then, to edit in space, to splice these two frames together to make a 'third meaning'? Neshat seems to respect this impulse, offering us the possibility both of something being gained and something being lost through the combination of the two. Douglas is more playful, and we seem to gain less from the comparison of body parts produced purely by the hanging together of his screens. However his pieces also raise an interesting point concerning film screens and painting frames: two paintings hung together will not necessarily call for us to look for a relationship; however once those frames contain moving images we suddenly want to put them together. It is as if duration – which creates relationships over time – infects even our treatment of frame to frame, as well as the in-frame.

The possibility of the double-screen installation working as a graphic edit is further explored in Beban's *I Can't Make You Love Me* (UK, 2003). Two screens are placed slightly facing out in a triangular shape (like the open pages of a book) with a slight gap between them. As with Neshat's and Ahtila's works, on one side we see the woman and on the other the man. However, what distances Beban from these other two artists is the fact that on each screen we see an unrelenting track

36 G. Matt, 'In conversation with Sherin Neshat', in *Sherin Neshat* (London and Vienna: Serpentine Gallery and Kunsthalle, 2000), pp. 10–29.

37 Ibid.

ICan't Make You Love Me
(Breda Beban, 2003)

from left (thus outside) to right (centre) on one side and right (centre) to left (outside) on the other. The effect is such that the space between the screens becomes a vanishing point into which the two figures do, literally, disappear and then reappear achieving a kind of inkblot effect. This piece is heavily redolent of Marina Abramovitz's work with Ulay, in its very literal performance of a relationship.[38] Beban also seems aware of the way in which diptychs have been used and has gone one step further, commenting on the tendency to compare, to read alongside, across frames, between screens, in surface rather than in depth.

38 See Fowler, 'Double visions'.

In all of the gallery films cited so far – McQueen's, Lewis's, Gordon's, Neshat's and Beban's – there seems to be an attempt, manifest through different techniques, to examine and escape the urgent passage of linear time, or what Barthes referred to as the 'continuous voracity' of the filmic image:

> Do I add to the images in movies? I don't think so; I don't have time: in front of the screen, I am not free to shut my eyes; otherwise, opening them again, I would not discover the same image; I am constrained to a continuous voracity; a host of other qualities, but not pensiveness.[39]

39 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. R. Howard (New York, NY: Hill O Wang, 1993), p. 55.

Through their use of performance, overstated mise-en-scene and framing, and the doubling of screens these artist-filmmakers approach what Deren thought of as vertical time, or a way of interrupting the flow and allowing the pensiveness that Barthes so wished might be a part of cinema's experience.

Ahtila, gallery films and a time of 'meanwhile'

A different language is needed to describe the structure of the experience of a gallery film: we might talk of the beginning and end of a piece as being when we walk in and out of the space; of images unfolding 'next to' each other rather than the time frame of 'what comes next'; of conventions such as repetition occurring in space (through multiple screens) as well as in time; and of images being experienced in a physical sense. I maintain in this essay that gallery films are different from cinema films, and that if shown in a cinema they would not achieve the vertical expansion that takes effect in the gallery. Of equal importance in the latter discussion has been the use of more than one screen, since it is through placing images side-by-side that the notion of time moving not necessarily on, but back and around, can be fully explored. Equally, in terms of film language the split-screen or diptych provides the opportunity to think about the difference between seeing images one after the other, so that what was just present swiftly becomes past and has to be remembered, and seeing them next to each other, so that past and present can exist simultaneously in a time of 'meanwhile'.

Such questions have framed the research of Ahtila, who has produced both a doctoral thesis and several works shown in different versions as single-screen 35mm cinema films and multi-screen gallery films. Ahtila's work explores the effectiveness of multi-screen gallery projections for exploring issues of identity, specifically in terms of the layers of reality and fantasy, past, present and future, hopes, fears and projection, desire and anxiety that go to make up a single moment in her characters' lives. At any one instance in her gallery films, the combination of images (on two, three or more screens) are creating an ambiguity, intertextuality and fragmentation of time that forces us into a kind of limbo-moment, such that Daniel Birnbaum has suggested: 'In Ahtila's works the subject seems to live in time but also be time'.[40] With *Consolation Service*, on sale as a DVD with both versions, we can directly compare the differences between single-screen cinema and split-screen gallery film.

40 Chris Darke, 'Split screen: Finnish artist film-maker Eiije-Liisa Ahtila in conversation', *Vertigo*. vol. 2, no. 3 (2002), pp. 46–8.

Consolation Service has an unseen female narrator who takes us through the film that, as she tells us at the beginning, divides itself into three parts:

> Melted snow falls from balconies ... the young couple at number ten have split up ... I'm sitting at the window writing a story about them, it is a story about an ending, the first section describes how to do it, in the second one it happens, the third section is a kind of consolation service, here it is ...

The first part sees wife Anni and husband JP go to see a therapist who is helping them deal with the problems in their marriage since the birth of their baby; here they decide to divorce. The second part features a birthday party for JP, then a sequence in which the couple and some friends walk across some ice that breaks and they appear to drown. In the third part Anni is alone with her baby, twice JP digitally 'materializes' but then disappears, the third time this happens Anni bows back to him, as if 'consoled'.

Thus far I have suggested that the difference between cinema and gallery films can be seen in four stages:

> a foregrounding of the frame (through the in-frame – content);
> a connection to the outside (through the out-of-frame – context);
> meaning being made in a physical sense (in time and in space);
> the comparative viewing experience of images on more than one screen, thus as next to, rather than next.

Each of these aspects is present in *Consolation Service*, but added is a sense of 'meanwhile', of the simultaneous time that Deren wishes to evoke in *At Land*, for example, with her self running on the beach attracting the attention of her other selves. Through this time of meanwhile, Ahtila manages to provide a space for the pensiveness

longed for by Barthes; thus, to quote Deren, 'probing the ramifications of the moment ... its qualities and depth'. To illustrate this I will focus on the second part of the gallery film.

Ahtila says of *Consolation Service*:

> It's about the divorce of a young man and a woman and the presentation is like a split screen with two projections. With that I wanted to explore what happens to a story when you see it on one screen and then on two.

Later on she adds:

> For me, the split screen is always a physical experience. If you have it in an installation it has to do with physical presence, which is one of the reasons why I wanted to start to work with the moving image.[41]

Consolation Service is closer in form and intent to *Meshes in the Afternoon* than any work previously discussed. For a start it depicts the breakdown of a relationship between a couple, a theme hinted at in *Meshes* by many of the symbolic images. There is the same preoccupation with the revelation of the filmmaking process and the combination of realistic settings and fantasy action. The setting in the gallery and use of the diptych form allow Ahtila to make the logic of the vertical about more than simultaneity, things happening at the same time; it also becomes an expression of the subject itself, as both Anni and the spectator are set the task of 'comprehending the uniqueness of the co-existence of two individuals and the inevitable changes that must occur when that relationship comes to the end.'[42]

Whilst both single-screen and gallery films have the theme of separation at their centre, the gallery film forces us to engage with the coming apart of the couple as a physical experience (manifest in the split screen) as well as a formal and thematic one. This is evident from the very beginning of the gallery film. As the narrator finishes her introduction, and says 'here it is', so we see JP walking into the hospital. However in the gallery film the line is followed by a kind of blocking diagram pinned to a blackboard on the left screen, showing where everyone is in the space. In light of the spatialization of the images that we have already established can take place in the gallery space, this diagram seems to be asking us to think of the separation of Anni and JP not just thematically or formally but also physically in terms of our own bodies. This being the case, the idea of separation can be seen to work here both in-frame (as we are cued in to where the characters are arranged on screen) and out-of-frame (since the diptych format asks us to look from one screen to the next and from edge-of-frame into the gallery space).

The spatial separation of the couple is evident in the cinema film of *Consolation Service* since it is shot using edits to separate the couple time and time again. The gallery film then maximizes this system by

41 Daniel Birnbaum, 'Crystals of time: Eija Liisa Ahtila's extended cinema', in *Eija-Liisa Ahtila: Fantasized Persons and Taped Conversations* (Museum of Contemporary Art, The Finnish National Gallery, Crystal Eye, 2002), p. 202.

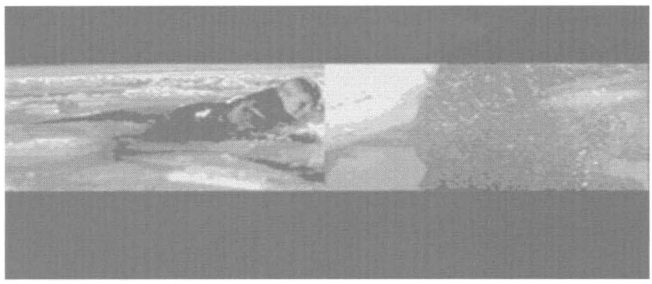
42 Kariyli-Annala, 'Talking selves', in *Eija-Liisa Ahtila: Fantasized Persons*, p. 223.

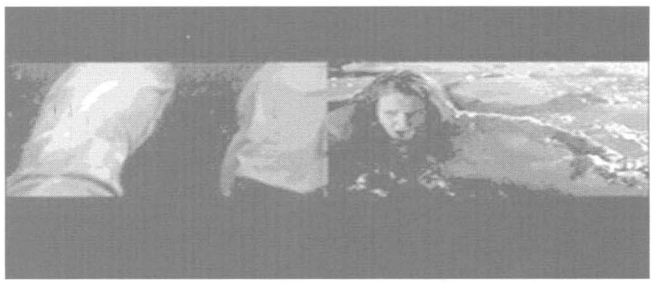
placing the couple on opposing screens, thereby making use of the possibilities we have seen for distance, opposition and division offered by the split screen. In the first part Anni and JP are positioned on either side, with the therapist in the middle where the audience would be. Having set up this system Ahtila then makes particular use of screen direction. They not only turn physically away from each other they also look offscreen into the gallery space, further suggesting the separation between them; this positioning seems to implicate the viewer, as if asking us to take sides.

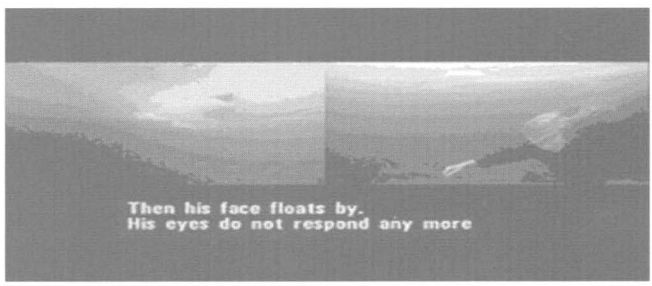
Ahtila's editing and use of camera is complex, as she never leaves the couple simply apart, cut away from each other. Instead she often makes use of camera movement to suggest that there is still a relationship between the two characters (for example a cut to Anni followed by a pan back to JP). The split screen may separate them, but it also complicates continuity of space, since a pan from Anni to JP is bisected by the split of the screen. It is on the right-hand screen (Anni's) that the gallery film inserts shots of inanimate objects – a plant, flowers and the diagram of the space – each of which seems to work in a similar way to Deren's inanimate objects – her key, knife and flower. If we are meant to infer that these are part of Anni's experience then our point of view seems thus to be shifted towards her. At one point Anni is on the right, looking out of frame, and on the left is what seems to be a point-of-view shot of the door. The door magically opens and we cut to people in the waiting room, further evidence of Anni's reveries. Our experience of the narrative is expanded from a story about a divorce to one which includes senses and sensations, emotions, memories and fantasies.

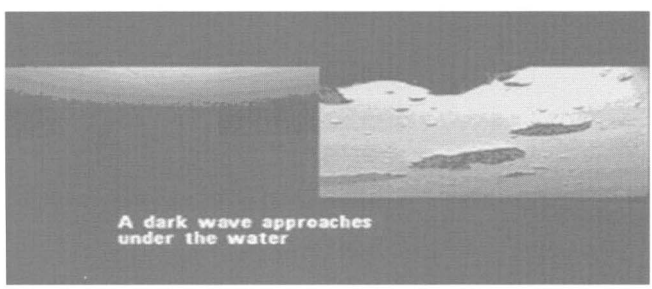
In the second part of the film JP has invited three friends to celebrate his birthday, and Anni is there as well. We see him blow out the candles, then two friends tell dirty jokes. The group then walks outside in the cold and dark, and Anni decides they must walk across a frozen lake. As they are doing so, Anni and 'girl one' describe what it would be like to drown, then the ice breaks and everyone falls through. The possibility of a conventional recollection of themes introduced in the first part presents itself, as the ideas of loss, separation and the uncertainty of parting are played out once more. This could be compared with Deren's own repetition of entering the house in *Meshes in the Afternoon*; however, Ahtila's film couples this narrative repetition of themes with a visual system of overlapping, which has the effect of allowing layers of mood and theme to be expressed, rather like in music (which is of course another medium of comparison with Deren).

Once the group of friends has broken through the ice, a series of above and below combinations are played out on the different screens. As girl one tries to get out, so we see other bodies sinking. As Anni takes her last few gasps above the water, her legs are seen kicking furiously below.









Consolation Service
(Eija Liisa Ahtila, 1999)

The overlapping begins once everyone has sunk below the surface of the water. With diegetic sound now taken up with underwater sounds, the images are accompanied by voiceovers from Anni, the narrator, then finally Anni again. Anni begins 'there's a place for me here', and her words seem to contemplate the fear and trauma of separation in a different sense to that seen in part one. On the imagetrack these words are accompanied by striking tracking shots, looking up to the ice above as if contemplating its abstract patterns and looking for a place. Then the tone of Anni's voiceover shifts from an accepting serenity to a more abrupt interruption, as she says 'then his face floats past'. On the imagetrack only one screen changes here, so that on the left we stay with the mood of finding a place, being becalmed and resigned – even optimistic – while on the right we are suddenly reminded of her former life and love as the floating body of JP passes.

A similar use of the split screen follows when the narrator starts talking. There are no longer any signs of life, and instead the images are the same on both screens, representing a murky river bed. The narrator begins: 'at the bottom there are naked bodies, other drowned people'. She finishes: 'a chest cavity opens up, spreads and engulfs everything. Everything is in the water, which has no limits.' Anni follows this with: 'a dark wave approaches under the water.... Something presses against my back, puts its head on my neck – and touches it with its lips.' On the imagetrack only the right screen changes, whilst on the left we stay with the murky depths described by the narrator; on the right we return to our abstract images, this time of pockets of air under the ice. For a second time, voices, moods, and tones are allowed to coexist in a time of 'meanwhile', a time only possible because of the doubled image offered by the split screen in the gallery.

Immersing oneself in gallery films it is possible to lose one's sense of causality, of meaning being made in succession and of the end being the finish. Caught in Deren's 'mesh', time is frozen, replayed, remembered, reordered and foreshadowed. Consequently the moving image expands to fill space and time, inviting responses from its spectators that are very far from the passive, distanced stance of the auditorium. Gallery films need to be read from within film theory, in terms of what they offer both in-frame – a play with framing, mise-en-scene, and editing – and out-of-frame – a connection to the space outside the frame that forces us to read in a more involved, embodied way. Side by side, Neshat's, Beban's or Ahtila's images force a repetition forwards and in space that enriches our interpretation. Maybe now we can return to Deren in a moment not of recollection backwards but of repetition forwards, and use gallery films to imagine how, if she had lived as long as her ideas, *Meshes in the Afternoon* might have been.

Thanks go to the Faculty of Media Arts and Society, Southampton Institute, for funding the research for this paper, Jacqueline Furby, Karen Randell and two anonymous readers for comments and suggestions.

Branding Hollywood: studio logos and the aesthetics of memory and hype

PAUL GRAINGE

In August 1993, *The New Yorker* expressed concern that the torch-bearing figure in the monumental trademark of Columbia Pictures had lost weight and transformed from a marble statue to a lifelike figure with a passing resemblance to Hillary Clinton. Purchased by Sony in 1989, Columbia moved to update its logo and refigure the studio's identity for what corporate executives labelled a 'new phase in its history'.[1] This was not the first such modification. While the US flag had been removed from the logo in 1941 to be replaced with plain drapery, the 'Lady' was removed altogether in 1975, giving way to an abstract logo that set the image of torchlight against a black crescent design. Signalling Columbia's diversification into the key markets of film, video and television, the abstract logo symbolized the company's desire to 'light up all corners of the entertainment world'. In significant ways, the 1993 redesign was part of a widespread tendency among studios to refashion corporate identity in times of change. However, it happened in a period in which branding had become an especially powerful imperative for both new and established media companies, serviced by a growing number of brand consultants, logo specialists and graphic design boutiques.

In the 'transaction-rich nexus of markets' that surrounds and supports media industries, brand consultants flourished in the 1990s, responding to changing orthodoxies and technologies of promotional imaging.[2] Within broadcast industries in particular, branding practices based on the development of specific kinds of programming content

1 See Ann Barry, 'Weight watchers', *New Yorker*, 16 August 1993, p. 25.

2 The rise of transaction networks in the industrial move from Fordism to flexible specialization is dealt with succinctly in Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994), pp. 111–44.

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were matched with a proliferation of network slogans, screen logos (bugs) and channel identifiers (idents). Graphically innovative brand campaigns became a routine feature of a network landscape defined by the pressures and economics of channel differentiation.[3] Meanwhile, the early 1990s saw a flurry of modifications to studio logos in response to broad changes in corporate management and the launch of specific entertainment divisions. From refinements to Columbia's torch-bearing Lady, to the appearance of Bugs Bunny and of lion cubs on the family entertainment banners of Warner Bros (in 1993) and MGM (in 1994) respectively, logos became indicative symbols of global media restructuring in a period that the executive vice-president of Columbia, Sid Ganis, described as 'about richness, depth, and, yes, the grandeur of Hollywood, but also about emotion and communication'.[4] Logos were vital in the perceived need to update corporate identity for prospective entertainment futures. In visual terms, this involved the use and incorporation of digital effects, rendering logos in creatively engineered and increasingly panoramic forms. High-tech resuscitations were able to hold the glories of Hollywood's past in balance with the promise of something adaptive and new. While studio logos function in a different way to the brand idents of network television – figured as discreet corporate signatures within a film's tailored publicity rather than as a means of cohering specific kinds of programming content – Hollywood trademarks have nevertheless been influenced by the dynamic modes of logo projection that have arisen in what Michael Curtin calls the 'neo-network era'.[5]

This term is used by Curtin to describe a new volatility in contemporary culture industries, encompassing film as well as television. It approximates the reorganization of the US culture industries around neo-Fordist models of flexible accumulation, describing an industrial configuration in which production, marketing and distribution systems have become increasingly diverse and decentred. Foretelling the difficulty facing large corporations in controlling the distribution of cultural forms, Curtin suggests that, just as IBM lost its dominant organizational position in the computer industry, Hollywood studios and network broadcasters face a similar risk. He writes: 'we may be witnessing a shift away from an emphasis on hardware and limited channels of distribution towards software and flexible corporate frameworks. Rather than a centralized network structure anchored by New York finance, Hollywood studios, and state-regulated technology, the neo-network era features elaborate circuits of cultural production and reception.'[6] In a period characterized by industrial transition – when a mass audience can no longer be dependably constructed, systems of copyright governance have been challenged by the emergence of digital piracy, and electronic technologies are threatening to eclipse the basis of long-held network and studio empires – entertainment companies have sought to project

3 This inspired the growth of a small cottage industry of independent design companies, typified by the launch of Pittard Sullivan in 1987, that used advancements in digital technology to create integrated graphics packages for the entertainment industry in US and European markets. Responsible for title sequences in the television drama *ER* and graphics in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), for example, Pittard Sullivan was cast in *Variety* as the symbol of a new graphic sensibility in media branding based around dynamic and digitized promotional imaging. For a useful discussion of television branding, see John McMurria, 'Long-format TV: globalisation and network branding in a multi-channel era', in Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (eds), *Quality Popular Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 65–87. See also 'Imagemakers', *Variety*, 2 June 1997, pp. 41–4.

4 Cited in 'What's in a logo?', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1993.

5 Michael Curtin, 'On edge: culture industries in the neo-network era', in Richard Ohmann (ed.), *Making and Selling Culture* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996) pp. 181–202.

6 Ibid., p. 190.

their logos as a means of confirming specific kinds of industrial authority and viewing pleasure.

For Hollywood studios this endeavour has involved the dissemination of traditional brand signatures (or variations thereof) throughout the multiple consumer and exhibition windows of the global entertainment sector, carrying trademark labels across video, consumer products, animation, television, family entertainment and theatrical divisions. It has also shaped the logo aesthetics of motion picture features. Indeed, studio logos were given crisp visual makeovers in the 1990s and were often customized for specific blockbuster events:[7] the Warner Bros shield transformed into a forbidding green circuit board in *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), while owls and bats flew from its corners in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Chris Columbus, 2001). Meanwhile, the world logo of Universal became both the diluvian setting of *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds, 1995) and the desert sun in *The Mummy* (Stephen Sommers, 1999). Consistent with its overt theatricality, *Moulin Rouge!* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001) even staged a musical prelude to the cinematic unveiling of the 20th Century Fox searchlights. Studio logos have come to play a more pronounced role in the formal, stylistic and thematic unfolding of Hollywood trailers and credit sequences, inviting questions about not only the nature of corporate branding in post-classical Hollywood, but also how logos act upon, and can give meaning to, a film.

With the growing complexity of production and distribution deals, and the tendency of the major studios to spread risk through agreements with other companies, credit sequences can find themselves prefaced with a volley of corporate logos. Those of the majors may appear for a number of reasons: if the movie was financed and developed exclusively for a studio, if it was created for a production company based at the studio, or if the studio functioned as the distributor. David Cook notes that during the 1970s, when studios reconfigured their power base in distribution, the majors would brand independent productions as their own, 'bolstering their image as purveyors of feature films to the nation'.[8] This trend has continued on an international scale, adding to the general complexity of who makes, owns and profits from what. Logo sequences can include a range of highly narrativized brand signatures, including those of distributors and production outfits, as well as technical trademarks such as Dolby.[9] In a period when studios/companies compete for, and seek to extend, presence in the global entertainment market, and when audiovisual libraries have become an important source of brand value in their capacity to be figured as equity, corporate logos have acquired a dynamic function in the cultural economy of filmed entertainment.

It is the projection of studio logos, particularly those of the majors, that I want to explore in this essay. Specifically, I wish to examine how the process of 'bringing to life' corporate logos relates to key negotiations of studio identity in a changing media landscape. Henry

7 Transformations in logo design were undertaken either by in-house design units such as The Idea Place (Warner Bros) or by one of the proliferating number of graphic design boutiques servicing the contemporary motion picture business.

8 David Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970–1979* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p. 21.

9 With the introduction of its digital and surround technology in 1992, Dolby has used a number of visual trailers to announce the audio effects of spectacular sound. With titles such as Aurora, Train, City, Canyon, Egypt, Temple and Rain, these convey a scenic inhabiting of the Dolby universe. See Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* (London: Routledge, forthcoming), ch. 4.

Jenkins suggests that 'since the breakdown of the studio system, Hollywood has entered into a period of prolonged and consistent formal experimentation and institutional flux with a media-savvy audience demanding consistent aesthetic novelty and difference'.[10] Studio logos reveal a telling history in this context. Evoking the legacy of the studio system while announcing the novelty of contemporary film events, studio logos are bound in a representational economy of memory and hype. This essay will examine these dynamics by drawing upon the logo history of Warner Bros and Paramount.[11] Seeking to develop an expansive purview of corporate branding associated with motion picture features, I will consider expressions of studio branding and logo design in key moments of the post-classical period. As a symbolic inscription of media memory and industrial advertisement, studio logos provide an acute means of analyzing the expressive history of entertainment branding in the era of package-unit production; they offer a specific entry point into what Thomas Elsaesser has described as the 'micro-links and macro-level synergies that hold today's media culture together'.[12]

10 Henry Jenkins, 'Historical poetics', in Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich (eds), *Approaches to Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 114.

11 My choice of examples represents an attempt to move beyond the somewhat routine example of Disney in developing a sense of the brand environments created by and within media industries.

12 Thomas Elsaesser, 'The blockbuster: everything connects, but not everything goes', in Jon Lewis (ed.), *The End of Cinema as We Know it* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 13.

On the history of studio logos

In her discussion of the history and theory of film advertising, Janet Staiger suggests that Hollywood's promotional activities must be analyzed in terms of the normative procedures that have been established in specific periods of time. While Hollywood has frequently imitated the strategies of modern advertising practice, she suggests that the film industry has also had to adjust and innovate marketing methods for its own particular needs and problems. Staiger writes that from the period of early cinema, 'it was not at all apparent that what the industry had to sell was a product. Rather it was the *experience* of an entire show that had to be sold: a show that eventually would feature one special film that would run for only a certain period of time and be replaced by a similar – but different – movie.'[13] In the first decade of the twentieth century, the motion picture industry advertised and distributed its product by way of the company brand. With films conceived as a relatively standardized commodity (offered on one-reel films), the brand name of the production company – Biograph, Vitagraph, Lubin, Pathé – took precedence. With the rise of the star system, however, a shift occurred in the public mind from brands to stars.[14] By 1913, changes in the industry system – including the development of the feature film, the emergence of fan magazines and other formal means of achieving close identification with actors – set in place a transition that reduced production companies, and later studios, to the background of promotional activity.

13 Janet Staiger, 'Announcing wares, winning patrons, voicing ideals: thinking about the history and theory of film advertising', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1990), p. 3.

14 See Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907–1915* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 103–19.

This did not lessen the need to invest in corporate trademarks. Indeed, they became an integral part of the studio system in demarcating particular kinds of 'house style' in the context of greater

uniformity within Hollywood's industrial practices. Based on the organization of stars and genres, and what became an aggregate pattern of movie output based on the tastes and dispositions of key producers, logos became the manifestation of a studio's 'corporate personality'. Thomas Schatz relates this to the series of institutional forces – including production operations, management structures, talent pools, narrative traditions and marketing strategies – that comprised the output and identity of the integrated majors from the 1920s.[15] Logos became a signature of product differentiation within a still fairly stable system of marketing and sales. While the Warner Bros shield became associated with films of a certain narrative and technical economy, expressed in the studio's hard-bitten and stark foundation genre of the gangster film, the MGM lion primed the high gloss and glamour of the studio's numerous prestige spectacles. This puts the case simply, of course, for brand association was figured around a constellation of product cycles and the inveterate pursuit of novelty and innovation on the part of the majors. Nevertheless, logos were associated with a particular repertoire of expectations, mapped according to the competitive dynamics and house styles of the classical studio system.

Studio logos from the classical era have proven to be resilient. Despite complex transformations in ownership and the emergence of conglomerate business structures, Warner Bros, MGM, Columbia, Paramount, 20th Century Fox and Disney remain potent corporate trademarks. In comparing the logo histories of these corporate brands, patterns emerge that connect specific changes in the use and design of studio logos to particular forms of institutional and industrial transition. This can be illustrated by the major logo designs of Warner Bros between 1923 and 2003.[16] In formal terms, the Warner Bros shield has undergone a series of refinements that can be used to establish the changing shape of cultural/corporate signatures.

The first logo to appear (1923–29) saw a narrow shield on a black background, a picture of the Warner Bros studio in the top part of the shield and the bottom part containing the elongated lettering 'WB' (figure 1). Placed above or below the shield was the legend 'A Warner Brothers Production'. With the move towards national advertising campaigns in the 1920s, and with developments in the use of trailers, company logos were part of the standardization of advertising practice that occurred as studios grew in size and began to accentuate their identity as vertically integrated majors. While Warner Bros framed its studio facility within a fraternal coat of arms, the Paramount peak (based on Wadsworth Hodkinson's personal memory of a mountain in Ogden, Utah) was crowned with a halo of stars after Alfred Zukor criticized the new distribution company as sounding 'like a brand of cheese or woollen mittens'.[17] Although characterized by factory-like organization and the use of mass-production methods, the nascent film industry used images of historical and cultural grandeur to establish and legitimize its particularity as a manufacturer of entertainment products.

15 Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

16 I am concentrating here on the logos designed for the presentation of feature films, although a full logo history would have to include the various permutations of the Warner Bros logo designed for television, animation, music and home entertainment. There may be frequent variations within feature logos themselves, although these are usually based on a core, or official, design specific to a particular period.

17 See Bernard F Dick, *Engulfed: the Death of Paramount Pictures and the Birth of Corporate Hollywood* (Lexington, KT: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p. 9.

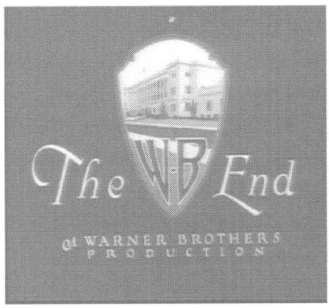


Fig. 1. 1923.

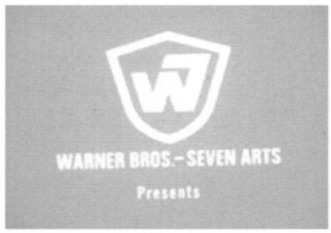


Fig. 2. 1967.

Fig. 3. 1972.

Fig. 4. 1999.

All images by kind permission of Warner Bros.

In the second design (1929–36), 'Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.' appears above a very small shield containing the stylized 'WB' lettering. Gone is the picture of the early studio at Sunset and Bronson. New to this design, however, is a waving flag and the promotional lettering of 'the Vitaphone Corp.', the company established between Warner and Western Electric to develop the pioneering sound technology that would truly consolidate the position of Warner Bros in the emerging studio system. Reflecting Hollywood's co-ordinated investment in technological innovation as a means of creating (and pronouncing) competitive advantage, the new studio logo was used at the beginning of studio pictures and (with an additional ring of concentric circles) feature animation. According to David Bordwell, the advent of sound cinema canonized the narrativization of the credit sequence, encouraging a higher degree of graphic and aural play in the initiation of film narrative.[18] While studio logos still had a limited narrative function at this point, they were becoming resonant indicators of particular kinds of production value.

The third and fourth logos, introduced between 1936 and 1948, are of a now familiar design in which an enlarged Warner Bros shield is superimposed over an image of clouds, with 'Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.' appearing over the shield or as a line across the shield. This is the first logo to use zooming, the shield design moving up to the screen. Developments in the use of colour film stock allowed this version of the logo to appear in sepia, accompanied musically either by the beginning of the movie's theme, or the sound of a majestic horn. This style was effectively 'cleaned' between 1949 and 1967, creating a fifth

18 See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 25–9.

logo design in which the border, banner and text of the shield widen and appear in gold, set against a blue cloud background. This represents the formalized logo of the late studio era, more precise in terms of visual definition but unmistakably developed from the early brand design. This also became the base for a number of variations that marked the Warner Bros television signature in the 1950s and 1960s. Becoming one of the predominant suppliers of network television programming in the late 1950s, Warner Bros developed logos that would distinguish the studio's theatrical feature films from its television products. Television serials often superimposed the Warner Bros logo onto scenic action, while animated cartoons saw characters such as Bugs Bunny and Road Runner lean against the famous shield, a design that would be replicated in the 1990s. With the demand for television programming increasing the book value of the majors' film libraries to two and three times the value of its stock, studios became ripe for corporate takeover; the shift to television production in Hollywood signalled a growing trend towards the integration of media industries. Often discussed as representing a key transition from Old to New Hollywood, this ushered in a period of change in the form and currency of studio logos.[19]

Between 1967 and 1972, the Warner Bros logo appeared in three variations of a design that reflected transitions in ownership and the formation of 'Warner Bros. – Seven Arts' in 1967 and 'Warner Communications Inc.' in 1972. While two of these designs retained the original Warner Bros shield (changing the background palette to solid blue, and cutting the shield with the words 'A Kinney Company'), a more radical design was signalled by the brief introduction of a new logo that saw the Warner Bros – Seven Arts shield combine a squat W with an arching 7 (figure 2). While this ligature was justified by the designers, Scope Advertising, as having a 'daring simplicity' symbolic of the 'clear thinking men who are the company's leaders', for others it diminished an essential part of cinema experience, namely the 'excitement and anticipation of trademarks appearing on screen'.[20] For Gerald Pratley, writing in *Variety* in 1967, the new symbol was a pitiful result of the merger between Hollywood studios and industries with no connection to motion pictures, a symbol that appeared to be a 'cross-bred animal that turned out a freak – a mutation looking back at what's left of its former self with shocked surprise'.[21] The design, colour and graphic lettering of corporate logos have long been used to index the brand identity of new corporations and product lines, establishing associations or effects that are linked to particular discursive registers and specific ideas of taste. In the 1970s, media logos took on a stylized and contemporary edge, moving away from pictorial logos – which had come to represent the heavy weight of profitability crisis in the case of the major studios – towards abstract graphics and block colour that were cast by studios as 'more attractive, tasteful and progressive'.[22]

19 See Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: the Studio System in the Fifties* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994).

20 Gerald Pratley, 'Modern masterminds scorn of much-loved old film trademarks', *Variety*, 3 March 1968.

21 Ibid.

22 While MGM introduced an abstract poster-like lion in 1966, Paramount moved towards a blue abstract rockface under Gulf and Western in 1968. Meanwhile, Columbia dispensed with its famous Lady in 1975 in place of a torch symbol. See 'MGM gets new logo', *Variety*, 21 September 1966.

The tendency towards abstract design was typified between 1972 and 1984 by the ninth major version of the Warner Bros logo. Heralding the creation of 'Warner Communications Inc.', a red abstract W was introduced, consisting of two slanted elongated circles and a shorter elongated circle, zooming in towards the middle of the screen (figure 3). Not only did this logo challenge the traditional Warner Bros shield, it transformed Warner's brand colour from blue and gold to a combination of red and black. This must be set against the backdrop of the movie industry's deep slough in the late 1960s and the need to revitalize performance. According to Connie Bruck, when Kinney acquired Warner in 1969, Steve Ross 'considered the Warner Bros movie production company the weak sister in the deal', announcing a writedown of $59 million on the asset value of all movies, including those in process and just released.[23] Having lost its sheen as a moneymaking studio, and with the onset of the brave new world of entertainment conglomeration, Warner's logo was revamped to express a regime change in the style and purpose of media operations. From Warner's new system of autonomous divisions (with film overseen by Ted Ashley) to its ranging stake in developments such as cable and video, the 1970s witnessed the emergence of film as one of many possible profit centres, and no longer the gravitational focus of corporate/brand identity.

The restabilization of Hollywood as an industry within this structure led to the return of the classic Warner Bros shield, indicative of film's centrality to the synergistic aspirations of increasingly streamlined entertainment conglomerates in the 1980s and 1990s. The tenth logo design, between 1984 and 1998, returned to the golden Warner Bros shield, set over the blue background of clouds. A succession of corporate names have appeared under the shield: 'A Warner Communications Company' (1984–90), 'A Time Warner Company' (1990–92), 'A Time Warner Entertainment Company' (1992–2001, figure 4) and 'An AOL Time Warner Company' (2001–03). In most cases, the logo is silent or combined with the beginning of a movie's theme but, since 1998, a computer-generated logo marking the 75th anniversary of Warner Bros has used a sepia impression of the Burbank studio, shimmering towards the screen in the rotating form of the company's traditional shield. Exploiting new techniques of computer-generated imagery and digital sound, this design is indicative of the move towards three-dimensional logos, characterized by swooping aerial panoramas and clean orchestral fanfares. Many of the major studios have developed anniversary trailers of a similar kind, heightening audiovisual impact while capitalizing on the growing and strategic investment in brand nostalgia. When Paramount introduced its 90th anniversary logo in 2002, using the famous peak, Jonathan Dolgen, chairman of Viacom, remarked: 'We wanted to maintain the integrity and historical value of our original logo while incorporating design elements commemorating our 90th anniversary'.[24] Integrity and

23 Connie Bruck, *The Master of the Game: Steve Ross and the Creation of Time Warner* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1994), p. 64.

24 Cited in Cathy Dunkley, 'Paramount updates logo for 90th anniversary', *Daily Variety*, 1 March 2002.

historical value are keywords here, central to the brand capital of studios whose contemporary franchise potential and extensive film libraries have become highly prized by conglomerates for their strategic function as (multimedia) content providers.

My intention in tracing this logo history is purposefully broad, and I have sought to draw out general patterns of change that can be applied more widely to other Hollywood studios. Across the majors, there are marked similarities in the evolutionary stages of logo branding. These include the successive development of classical design (experimenting with variations of image, colour, sound and perspective), the introduction of logos that differentiate theatrical from television product, the move from pictorial to abstract symbols in the early periods of media conglomeration, and the contemporary renaissance of classical design, enhanced by digital technologies.

It would be wrong to present such a logo history as necessarily sequential. Different logos may circulate in the same historical instance according to particular corporate or creative imperatives. Since 1995, Warner's abstract logo from the 1970s has been used as the logo of WarnerVision International, one of the company's television distribution arms. Conversely, modern logos can be used to sell and package old or 'classic' products. If a renewed interest in the cinematic past has become one of the by-products of the new relationship being forged in the age of video, cable and DVD between institutions, texts and viewers, logos both construct and complicate ideas of Hollywood history. While using the original MGM logo in the DVD release of *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959), the film was packaged in 2001 with the contemporary logo of Warner Bros (the MGM back catalogue being owned by Turner Entertainment, a subsidiary of Time Warner). By replacing or refreshing old studio signatures, media corporations have been able to claim proprietary rights over Hollywood's past, a form of brand annexation tied to the appropriation and circulation of competing logos. This must be seen in the context of developing transmission technologies and exhibition windows that have given film an extended product life cycle, and for which copyright ownership has become essential in spinning out corporate profits at as many levels as possible.

If studio logos are an integral part of the history of film advertising and marketing practice, one might ask in what particular ways their function and development can be understood as especially, or in any way, post-classical. Within Hollywood historiography, accounts of continuity and change have focused on varying periods and industrial/aesthetic pressures in demarcating the constituent territories of Old (classical) and New (post-classical) Hollywood.[25] Murray Smith suggests that tracing smaller-scale shifts and changes is perhaps a more productive analytic mode than postulating some epochal break between classicism and a putative post-classicism.[26] If studio logos indicate one such shift, they began to function differently with the increasing move

25 For concise accounts of Hollywood historiography as it bears upon post-classicism, see Richard Maltby, 'Nobody knows anything: post-classical historiography and consolidated entertainment', in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 21–44; Peter Kramer, 'Post-classical Hollywood', in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 289–309.

26 Murray Smith, 'On the philosophy of Hollywood history', in Neale and Smith (eds), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, p. 14.

towards package-unit production and event-based filmmaking. This, of course, reflects the history of the blockbuster, conventionally traced to the 1950s, accelerating in the 1970s, and dominating industrial practice from the 1980s. It is in this period that logos become more dynamic, both in the way they index corporate dissemination and change, and in the way they are 'brought to life' in relation to film texts themselves. At each level, studio brands are taken up within affective media economies based around the memory of Hollywood's past and the promise of contemporary spectacle.

Aida H. Hozic suggests that the 'intense and continuous battle over brand names between Hollywood's producers and merchants' is a key to understanding the disparate threads of Hollywood's economic development since the 1960s.[27] While this is linked to industrial struggles over stars and products, it also grounds the discourse of branding that would envelop former studios in their transformation into what Hozic calls the 'franchise-like media organizations' of the contemporary period. In essence, the major studios sought to foster and exploit their brand capital in a number of ways as they were refigured within global entertainment companies. This has come to include the development of theme parks, studio stores and network broadcasting platforms as environments for the selling of brand-based properties.[28] However, it has also seen the dynamic projection of logo signatures onto film products as companies have sought both to leverage the profit potential of the movie past and to assert market control in the present.

The revival of the cinematic past is linked in no small part to the branding imperatives figured around what Jan-Christopher Horak calls the 'Hollywood history business'.[29] This describes the investment in film history as a viable commodity that can be marketed on television and other electronic media. In brand terms, this bears heavily upon the equity vested in film libraries. When Ted Turner bought MGM/UA in 1985 for a staggering one billion dollars – anxious to secure the prized back catalogue for use on his cable networks – it was clear that studio brands carried enormous financial rewards. If brand equity describes the calculated price difference that a brand adds to a company over and above its material assets and total annual sales, the equity of major Hollywood studios is closely tied to the perceived value of their libraries. In 1996, this had become worth fifteen to twenty times the value placed on them in 1980, Wall Street weighing libraries heavily in valuing stock and banks being ready to accept them as collateral. Rayna Denison suggests that brand identities become attached to studios and companies through the composite and layered meanings built through specified relationships with their productions.[30] For the majors, this includes the history of these relationships across time. In economic terms, classic studio brands (whether owned or licensed) have become a core asset within the entertainment economy, something to manage and maintain, protect and project.

If the management of entertainment libraries (and their associated

27 Aida H. Hozic, 'Hollywood goes on sale: or, what do the violet eyes of Elizabeth Taylor have to do with the "cinema of attractions"?', in David Desser and Garth S Jowett (eds), *Hollywood Goes Shopping* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2000), p. 206.

28 For different perspectives on the move from traditional models of packaged goods advertising to a new impetus towards branding values, environments and experiences, see Elizabeth Moor, 'Branded spaces: the scope of new marketing', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2003), pp. 39–60; Susannah Hart and John Murphy (eds), *Brands: the New Wealth Creators* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998); Celia Lury, *Cultural Rights* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 62–93.

29 Jan-Christopher Horak, 'The Hollywood history business', in Lewis (ed.), *The End of Cinema as we Know it*, pp. 33–42.

30 Rayna Denison, 'Presenting Studio Ghibli: *Mononokehime*'s role in the promotion of its creators' (unpublished paper).

logos) is one dimension of the incentive to protect the cultural and financial standing of contemporary media companies, the graphic projection (or bringing to life) of studio logos has become a concurrent brand strategy, linked to the negotiation of presence and identity in a diversified entertainment economy. Jerome Christensen examines this in allegorical terms, reading *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989) as an inscription of the larger corporate tensions produced in the historic merger between Time and Warner in 1989. He writes:

> If Vicki Vale is explicitly linked with Time, the character of disguised hero Bruce Wayne/Batman strongly suggests an impersonation of Warner. Batman is primarily associated with the privatised technological space of the batcave, set up as a television control booth. His eventual triumph over the forces of evil involves the installation in the heart of Gotham of a projection system that evokes the apparatus used by a motion picture studio during the production of premieres. Climactically, the image of the projected batsign visibly rhymes with the enskyed Warner Bros trademark that opens the film.[31]

Batman is an exemplar of the branded entertainment property, literally projecting a brand signature into various ancillary markets. However, the film also projects Warner Bros as a *corporate* brand. While Christensen reads this as an allegory of the calculated desire by Steve Ross 'to save Time in a world supervised by a Warner superhero,' the incorporation of studio logos can be analyzed more specifically as part of the aesthetic tendencies of 'industrial advertisement' that Michael Allen associates with Hollywood's ongoing desire to promote itself through the form of the blockbuster.[32] In being increasingly tailored to the aesthetic propensities of specific blockbusters – *Batman*'s 'gothic' Warner Bros shield differing from the binary code shield used for *The Matrix* – studio logos participate in what Allen calls the film industry's dual attempt to '(re)confirm the unique range of pleasures it can offer its audience, and [to signal] its continued survival in an increasingly threatening media landscape'.[33] The transfiguration of studio logos into the atmosphere (and even the diegesis) of Hollywood film is something that I want to explore in the next section, turning to the question of how logos act upon the films they frame.

31 Jerome Christensen, 'The Time Warner conspiracy: *JFK, Batman*, and the manager theory of Hollywood', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2003), p. 599.

32 Michael Allen, 'Talking about a revolution: the blockbuster as industrial advertisement', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 101–13.

33 Ibid., p. 113.

Moving the mountain

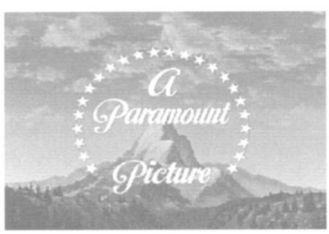
While fleeting, studio logos provide a link between what Thomas Elsaesser calls the macro and micro levels of film's particular conjoining of capital and desire. If the macro level describes the film industry's place within forms of modern capitalist business practice, the micro level describes particularized forms of pleasure that invite 'a

kind of repetition compulsion that ties the cinema experience to recollection and expectation'.[34] Elsaesser's suggestive, if generalized, point is that blockbusters can mobilize certain internal connections based around time: a folding movement that draws upon history, childhood and the memory of watching film. In providing the most obvious signature of Hollywood's corporate form and invested pleasure principle, one might argue that studio logos function at the very intersection of recollection and expectation, or what might be called the blockbuster's aggregation of memory and hype.

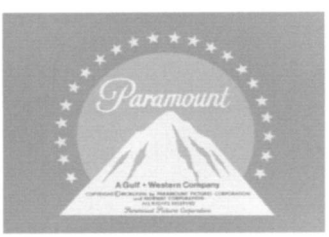
34 Elsaesser, 'The blockbuster', p. 16.

Hollywood has long used the aesthetics of logo design for explicit cinematic ends. However, the graphic projection of studio logos really emerged when the studio system began to disintegrate and the notion of film style shifted from a studio-based to an individual context. With the majors steadily refiguring their power base in distribution, logos took on a different register, no longer tied to production in any necessary fashion. While Paramount produced ten of the twenty-two films it released in 1973, it produced only five of twenty in 1975. This would become a dominant pattern across the majors, linked to investment strategies attuned to the enormous profit potential of the blockbuster. Richard Maltby writes that: 'by the mid-1970s the post-Paramount attitude of regarding each production as a one-off event had reached a point where none of the majors any longer possessed a recognizable identity in either its personnel or its product'.[35] In other words, studios were no longer associated with even the vestiges of a distinctive house style. And yet, the 'one-off event' gave rise to specific and playful instances of studio signification, symptomatic of the desire to accentuate their place in a changing media landscape. In a period when the majors were increasingly absorbed within integrated media structures, and where 'corporate personality' was becoming more

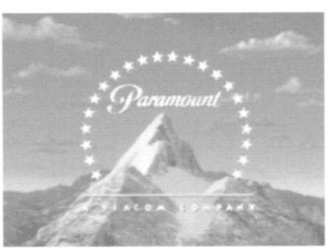
35 Maltby, 'Nobody knows anything', p. 31.



1954.



1968.



1999.

All images by kind permission of Paramount.

opaque, studio logos took on a more significant role in the coding of the 'presentational prowess' that Steve Neale associates with the visual and aural dimensions of (selling) film spectacle.[36]

Two films map this neatly, and introduce the projection of the Paramount peak to this study of logo aesthetics. Both *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) use Paramount's logo in ways that situate the studio in the discursive and textual *habitus* of each film. While *The Ten Commandments* was symbolic of Paramount's reliance on blockbuster strategies during the 1950s, overseen by Barney Balaban and George Weltner, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was released in a different industrial and aesthetic moment, as part of the rejuvenation of Paramount's fortunes within the new conglomerate structure of Gulf and Western, steered by the management of Barry Diller and Michael Eisner. While Paramount Pictures may have been 'engulfed' by corporate Hollywood, to use Bernard F. Dick's term, studios nevertheless sought to project their identity as a means of consolidating their position within competitive industrial hierarchies.[37]

The Ten Commandments begins with a frame of the widescreen Paramount logo, introduced in 1954 to accentuate the technological grandeur of VistaVision and its objective of 'filling the screen'. Instead of the mountain peak, the logo creates a more expansive perspective, heightening the sky and widening the mountain base to reveal a mist-covered forest. In the case of *The Ten Commandments*, the logo is further customized in colour and design. Instead of the usual cloud-strewn blue sky surrounding the peak, the mountain is set against a red sky. While the peak reflects the light of snow, the logo is filled with deep shades of red throughout. On closer inspection, the peak is not that of Paramount but of Mount Sinai itself. While the Paramount logo has seen variations in the size and shape of the mountain, in *The Ten Commandments* it becomes figured as God's veritable 'high place, his temple'. As the frame develops, accompanied by the film's orchestral score, the still picture of the red mountain is ringed by Paramount stars. Finally, the words 'A Cecil B. DeMille Production' appear at the bottom of the screen before the logo fades to black and the title of the film appears on the cover of a red Bible.

What interests me here is the way that Paramount becomes part of the film's symbolic tableaux. Michael Allen suggests that the technical systems that have been frequently allied to spectacular blockbusters (whether sound, colour, widescreen or digital effects technologies) have been used to make apparent 'the true hierarchy of the industry. Who are the companies who can afford to showcase them in big-budget movies? Who cannot?'[38] Separating major and minor studios, and distinguishing film from the competition of television, Paramount sought to bolster its increasingly vulnerable position in the 1950s with a technically well-endowed blockbuster. If VistaVision 'brought a new look to motion pictures, a permanent new look', *The Ten*

36 Steve Neale, 'Hollywood blockbusters: historical dimensions', in Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, pp. 47–60

37 See Dick, *Engulfed.*

38 Allen, 'Talking about a revolution', p. 103.

Commandments enabled the studio to project its own corporate prowess within the presentational and thematic unfolding of a biblical epic that placed a mountain at its dramatic core. Exiled from Egypt, and gazing upon Mount Sinai with his future wife Sephora, Moses asks if God lives on the mountain. Sephora replies: 'I do know that the mountain rumbles when God is there, and the earth trembles, and the cloud is red with fire'. In a film concerned with the spectacle of seeing (widescreen/God), the sublime gaze rests upon a mountain peak as the source of wondrous happenings. The conflation of Paramount and Sinai in the film's logo makes apparent, and individuates, the corporate force behind epic cultural spectacle.

The Paramount logo has offered itself up for various kinds of symbolic adoption. As an indicative 'nostalgia film' of the early 1970s, *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) used the logo in historically refractive terms, opening with the Paramount logo of the 1940s (featuring the mountain peak) and closing with the abstract blue logo of the 1970s (comprising a ring of stars and the word Paramount, *sans* peak). This helped to code *Chinatown*'s complex temporal identity, refashioning Hollywood's tradition of noir through a lens of stylistic pastiche (what Roman Polanski would describe as 'a film about the thirties seen through the camera eyes of the seventies'[39]). In significant ways, *Chinatown* drew on a signifying blend of memory and hype, using logos to index the atmospheric mood of the classical studio era while locating in time its own lavish production values. It is within the modern blockbuster economy, however, that studio logos have been more assiduously 'brought to life' in ways that engage both the chords of studio memory and the extant delivery of movie spectacle.

39 Cited in Cook, *Lost Illusions*, p. 189.

The contemporary impulse to project logo identity has emerged alongside graphic and representational shifts within movie form in general. However, it must also be seen as a function of the competitive dynamics of the entertainment market. In an industrial context governed by the commercial logic of the pre-sold property, studios have sought to formularize, but at the same time differentiate, a limited range of big budget movie events. Branding is a key tool in this context. While seeking to rationalize and control its product lines, branding enables Hollywood to create a feeling of novelty and difference amongst its product offerings. This can readily inflect the projection of studios themselves, anxious to assert their identity and output by trying to imbricate themselves in the blockbuster's nexus of capital investment and consumer desire.

Both *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Star Trek: Insurrection* (Jonathan Frakes, 1998) provide examples of contemporary logo projection. In *Raiders*, the Paramount peak bleeds into the actual diegesis of the film. Beginning with the standard Paramount logo, the image slowly fades into the opening sequence, replaced with a literal mountain scene replicating the pictorial logo. Over the mountain, the titles appear, beginning with 'Paramount Pictures Presents'. The back of a

silhouetted figure, wearing a hat, then strides in front of the camera, partially obscuring the mountain. The next title reads 'A Lucasfilm Ltd Production'. Walking towards the mountain, and revealing a bullwhip at his side, a third title reads 'A Steven Spielberg film'. The silhouetted figure then stops and looks at the mountain, hands on hips. 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' appears on screen before the camera dips and moves upwards, passing the mountain out of shot.

The title sequence is direct and playful in situating Paramount within the diegesis; the mountain becomes a reference point for character action and is central to the mise-en-scene in which Lucas and Spielberg (literally) write themselves onto the back of a mysterious hero. If *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is structured according to the serial format of the B-movie adventure story, the Paramount peak is promotionally dialogic. Based around the pursuit of tablets spectacularly formed in *The Ten Commandments* thirty years before, the opening sequence nods to Paramount's studio history while at the same establishing the ground for both the generic rekindling of the action cliffhanger and the formidable prospect of a high-budget movie by Lucas *and* Spielberg.

Paramount's symbolic projection in this moment is more than a clever narrative gimmick. Indeed, Spielberg and Lucas had reason to foreground Paramount as the sole studio willing to meet a bullish contractual offer where their joint services could be secured in exchange for complete financing ($20 million), director and producer fees ($1.5 and $4 million, respectively), the waiving of all overheads, distribution fees and ownership rights, and with percentage profits weighted in favour of Lucas (50% once rentals had reached $50 million) and Spielberg (10% once rentals had reached $40 million).[40] While tendered to all studios, only Michael Eisner at Paramount took the deal seriously, part of a strategic move towards high-concept filmmaking that Justin Wyatt suggests defined the 'personality' of Paramount in the 1980s in terms of visual style, genre and marketing approaches.[41] Major independents such as Miramax, and studios ranging from Pixar to Ghibli in Japan, all rely on a notional brand style in their demarcation of identity. The majors have the industrial muscle to be more varied in their project investments, but this does not preclude the accretion of brand style in specific moments, and around particular film cycles. At the time, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was Paramount's most profitable film ($363 million in rentals) and was emblematic of the studio's focal interest in developing individual entertainment brands. The projection of the Paramount logo was linked to the fusion of stylized and saturated genre narratives that Wyatt sees as the principle method used by Paramount to differentiate its product in the 1980s.

The *Star Trek* franchise grows out of this history, developing as a result of Paramount's decision to cross-fertilize with other corporate divisions in a model of prospective synergy. By 2002, the nine *Star Trek* films released since 1979 had collectively made $1.2 billion, with

40 See Dick, *Engulfed*, pp. 186–7.

41 Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 104–8.

merchandise sales exceeding $4 billion.[42] Much could be written of *Star Trek*'s brand status, but my interest is in the specific projection of the Paramount logo in the trailer sequence of the 1998 release, *Star Trek: Insurrection*. While standard corporate logos had, until this point, framed the *Star Trek* franchise, *Insurrection* witnessed the digital integration of the Paramount peak into the narrative milieu of the film. Specifically, the trailer sequence begins with a scenic view of the valley that surrounds the Paramount peak, gradually fading into a live action habitat that we learn to be the valley utopia of Baku. As the stars ('Paramount') and brand lettering ('A Viacom Company') disappear, the base of the mountain and surrounding forest come into view as the camera perspective withdraws across a digitally rendered valley. An eagle is heard but not seen as the camera moves behind and down a valley slope, obscuring the mountain and slowly its peak. When the mountain can no longer be seen, the shot seamlessly fades into a valley habitat that becomes the backdrop for narrative action, members of the Starship Enterprise fighting battles on snow-capped mountains, and villagers fleeing hillside slopes.

This example of logo projection is emblematic of the dynamic and digital character of studio branding within trailers and credit sequences of the 1990s and 2000s. Developments in computer-generated technology have provided a greater capacity for movement, zooming and narrative integration of logos. Where logo projection may once have been associated with auteur directors – creating a certain impetus for studios to affirm their identity in expensive showcase projects by the likes of DeMille, Polanski and Spielberg – *Star Trek: Insurrection* is indicative of the more routine process of customized logo imaging, enabled by greater levels of manipulation brought about by digital graphics and non-linear editing systems. In promotional terms, this can be seen as part of the broader media impulse to 'sign' products with engineered brand signatures, influenced by developments in digital imaging occurring in adjacent industries (such as network television), and designed to confer status on the studio blockbuster in a period when response to cultural forms has become increasingly dispersed and unpredictable.

Through various forms of logo projection in the three films briefly described, audiences are taken inside a habitat imagined to surround the Paramount peak. The corporate mountain is situated in and between the imperatives of industrial advertisement and each film's particular narrative imagination. This gives expression to what Thomas Elsaesser calls 'situation synergy', a term for the different levels of corporate/cultural referentiality that connect film as production and cinema as experience.[43] Tapping the linked awareness that filmgoers invariably develop of companies, films and the memory of going to the movies, studio logos inscribe a dual sense of recollection and expectation that can provide them with their own form of enchantment. Despite their inherent evanescence, logo signatures are part of the affective history

42 John Cloud, 'Star Trek Inc.', *Time*, 23 December 2002, pp. 62–3.

43 Elsaesser, 'The blockbuster', p. 20.

of film as screen entertainment, providing a way for established studios to lever the felt durability of their corporate/cultural legitimacy.

Throughout its history, Paramount has sought to exploit its trademark advantage as a major film distributor, using its logo to authenticate and differentiate its film product. While film distribution is highly concentrated, it is also distinguished by uncertainty, intensified by the growth of rival entertainment media and the development of electronic technologies that raise questions about the function of Hollywood in a world of prospective media convergence.[44] It is in this context that the majors have sought to exploit what Richard Maxwell terms the 'accumulation over time of consumer preference', accentuating the memory of studio logos as a mark of quality and trust.[45] However, logos have also come to function in a more adaptive fashion, helping to accentuate the event status of Hollywood film against the many possible alternatives for consumer spending within a diversified entertainment field. It is the aesthetic/affective combination of studio memory and blockbuster hype that can be applied more widely to the symbolic economy of post-classical logos. By tailoring the form and appearance of logos for specific presentational ends, and by occasionally insinuating themselves into a film's (promotional) diegesis, logos have helped code the event status of the modern blockbuster while visibly asserting the industrial history and position of their corporate progenitors.

44 According to Barry Litman, this is caused by the unpredictability of consumer tastes, the instability of market shares from one year to the next, and the frequent rotation of industry leadership among top firms. See Barry Litman, *The Motion Picture Mega-Industry* (Boston, MA: Allen and Bacon, 1998), pp. 44–67.

45 See Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), pp. 146–70.

Conclusion: branding and the culture of contemporary logos

Branding has become an instrumental part of Hollywood's production and dissemination of filmed entertainment, central to a blockbuster economy reliant upon revenues drawn from merchandising, franchising and product placement. From James Bond to *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), the branded media property is both an advertising space for the placement of consumer logos, and a synergy-driven logo in and of itself. Although film logos have been commonly analyzed as a function of product differentiation – examined from perspectives that explore the high-concept, dispersible, or post-Fordist nature of particular marketing strategies – much less has been made of the cultural significance of studio logos within this brand economy.[46] While publicity executives such as Barbara Brogliatti insist that entertainment companies 'concentrate on promoting our content and not ourselves',[47] studio logos have nevertheless developed a profligate life in the entangled networks of licensing, financing and distribution.

This has been particularly marked with the emergence of flexible conglomerate structures. Michael Curtin suggests that in a period when production operations are no longer centralized with a placed and permanent labour force, when new modes of electronic communication are making channels of distribution more fluid, and when the focus on a national mass audience is cross-cut by the pursuit of distinctive

46 For representative positions, see Wyatt, *High Concept*; Thomas Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Constance Balides, 'Jurassic post-Fordism: tall tales of economics in the theme park', *Screen*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2000), pp. 139–60.

47 Barbara Brogliatti is a corporate publicity executive at Warner Bros. E-mail correspondence with author, 28 September 2003.

audience subsets, industrial infrastructures are marked by a dialectical tension between global consolidation on the one hand (based around Fordist strategies of mass production, marketing and consumption), and cultural fragmentation on the other (based around neo-Fordist strategies of flexible production, dispersed marketing and niche consumption).[48] As a result, branding has emerged as a way of managing the relationship between products and consumers; it has become a strategic means of structuring and stabilizing volatile markets.

48 Curtin, 'On edge', p. 190.

Studio logos function variously in this context. Just as they can inscribe a fictional coherence to flexible industrial operations, they can also be deployed according to flexible marketing requirements. I have been concerned with the *projection* of studio logos, but this should not downplay their potential for effacement. Austin notes that Warner Bros consciously removed its logo in the British marketing of *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994) to reinforce the film's 'unofficial, "underground" and subculturally hip image'.[49] As this example suggests, logos are subject to the needs and dictates of flexible corporate frameworks that connect mass market operations to niche and localized initiatives. It remains the case, however, that logos have been brought to life more often than they have been hidden, erased, or momentarily put to rest.

49 Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, p. 159.

Since the vertical reintegration of the film industry in the 1980s and 1990s, the projection of studio logos has functioned in the context of collapsing boundaries between film/television/cable and between production, distribution and exhibition outlets. Entertainment companies like Warner Bros and Paramount have sought to channel and disseminate their corporate logos across the media terrain. Clearly, the multiple exhibition windows of the entertainment industry give studio logos a cultural, creative and copyright resonance beyond that of theatrical film alone. However, the modified logos of motion picture features have become a recurrent example of, and key site for, the reconstitution of cinema's affective address. In the case of filmed entertainment – and especially the logos tailored for the 'launch pad' of theatrical release – this address is distinguished by a brand economy of memory and hype. Studio logos are part of the creative and industrial armoury of the majors, used in the competitive struggle to associate themselves with cinema's past and experiential pleasures in the present.

While characteristic of the majors, this brand economy has also been seized on and developed by contemporary film studios seeking to challenge the oligopoly of the leading distributors. This is especially notable in the case of Dreamworks SKG. Established in 1994 around the troika of Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenburg and David Geffen, Dreamworks was the first movie studio to be set up in more than seventy years. As such, it devised a logo that proffered instant memory value. Using the fantasy image of a boy fishing upon the crest of a moon, the camera tracks up and across to reveal the 'D' of Dreamworks in a pillow bed of clouds. Reminiscent of the figure of

Elliot flying across the moon in *E.T.* (used in the logo of Spielberg's production company Amblin Entertainment), Warren Buckland suggests that the logo provides an 'overarching, visionary image', constructing an emotional experience of childhood innocence.[50] As a pure content company with no significant library, Dreamworks sought to invent its own tradition through the extension of Spielberg's brand status as New Hollywood's auteur storyteller. Meanwhile, the logo's highly narrativized digital sequence gave the studio a simultaneous association with technological and presentational edge.[51] While the film majors have sought to invest in their brand status, patterning the memory of their past and the promise of contemporary spectacle, the same combination of memory and hype has informed the promotional strategies of even the most recent studio ventures.

My intention here has not been to provide a comprehensive history or reading of studio logos across time, or to exaggerate moments of logo projection. Such instances exist alongside standard (and more static) forms of logo signature. However, in drawing out patterns of change, I would argue that logos have become more pliable as studios have become more uncertain about their status in a consolidated media market that supports, yet threatens, their power. Associated with the move from the mass production system of classical Hollywood to the package unit system of event-based filmmaking and high-budget blockbusters, studio logos have been 'brought to life' in accordance with specific industrial, aesthetic and technological pressures on film's particular equivocation of profitability and pleasure. As a means of demarcating corporate/presentational prowess, logos can be read as an index of film's status within the changing dynamics of the entertainment economy, and as a significant dimension of Hollywood's enduring, if not interminable, brand history.

50 Warren Buckland, 'The role of the auteur in the age of the blockbuster', in Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, pp. 84–98.

51 This would be further developed through a number of savvy and well-timed marketing campaigns associated with innovative production spectacles such as *Gladiator* (1999) and *Shrek* (2001). See Dade Hayes, 'So how does the Dream Work?', *Variety*, 10 June 2002.

Production/set design Introduction

SARAH STREET

Set design is rarely considered as a subject in its own right, and so far has received some, but not extensive, academic analysis. While the pioneering work of Léon Barsacq does much to enhance the status and demystify the work of European set designers, and Dudley Andrew highlights the importance of set design to French poetic realist cinema, it is only in recent years that a wider range of historical and theoretical perspectives has begun to emerge.[1] Charles Affron and Mirella Joan Affron, for example, analyze the relationship between film design and narrative, presenting five categories within which design is more or less capable of conveying an independent discourse. Their 'taxonomy' of 'design intensities' consists of examples of sets as mere 'denotation', in which they are largely 'invisible' and do not distract the viewer from the main thrust of the narrative – as in films such as *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) – to those at the other end of the interventionist spectrum in which 'decors privilege their own artifice' – as in *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982).[2] Much as theorists of costume in film have debated the extent to which costume functions as spectacular distraction, the same questions are therefore being addressed to sets and the concept of 'production design' more generally.[3]

Historically, the 'denotive' approach has been influential. In analyses of Hollywood cinema there has been a tendency to interpret sets as mere backdrops that are subordinate to the narrative. In an article written in 1957, Leo K. Kuter wrote that 'An art director conceives, designs, and completes a film's settings with no thought other than to help tell the story in every way commensurate with the production values indicated by the budget'.[4] Not that there was little appreciation of the work of designers. On the contrary, contemporary commentary

1 Léon Barsacq, *Le Décor de film* (Paris: Seghers, 1970); Léon Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions: a History of Film Design*, ed. Elliot Stein (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976); Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

2 Charles Affron and Mirella Joan Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

3 See Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 1990); Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1997); Sarah Street, *Costume and Cinema: Dress Codes in Popular Film* (London: Wallflower, 2001).

4 Leo K. Kuter, *Films in Review*, June-July 1957.

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often highlighted the difficulty of their job and their integral role in the entire production process:

> An art director must be a cross between an imaginative artist, an architect, a geographer and an interior decorator. He has to figure million-dollar costs with the cunning of a bride on a budget. He has to know whether it is better to take a crew to Canada to shoot a snowslide or build it near Gower St., Hollywood. He must know all periods of history and a lot about costumes as well as architecture. But all this special knowledge would be wasted if he didn't know in addition precisely the angles and lighting effects and colors that a cameraman can photograph.[5]

This emphasis on craft, on general abilities, on 'fitting in' with the overall production constraints has been identified as a key element of the task of the production designer/art director in a variety of contexts. The equation between successful design and realism was therefore an obvious link to make, even to the extent that many art directors defended their craft in those terms. As Daniel Cathcart, who worked at MGM, explains: 'Motion picture settings are so consistently convincing that they are hardly noticed. The ability to completely fool the audience, to convince them that what they see on the screen is real, is the art director's stock-in-trade.'[6] Hence in many contemporary reports that reference art direction there is praise for the achievement of 'authenticity' and the extensive preparatory research undertaken in its pursuit. The only exception to this tended to reside in the area of consumerist address, since it was acknowledged that sets played a distinct role in promoting desire for replication, the designer apparently having 'a direct line to the housewife's ear'[7] by encouraging audiences to copy screen designs in homes. The *Bringing Up Baby* (George Cukor, 1938) house designed by Van Nest Polglaze, for example, was credited with creating a new demand for Connecticut farmhouses.[8]

Charles Tashiro has argued that the study of set design ought, however, to extend beyond a mere consideration of its supposed relationship to script/story, since 'while it is certainly reasonable to discuss the effect of narrative on design, it is less reasonable to focus on narrative as the exclusive, or even primary, determinant of meaning'.[9] Our response to a set clearly depends on a variety of factors: 'Regardless of the degree of verisimilitude intended, the set of meanings derived from both the film itself and the cultural context results in an unsteady mixture of associations'.[10] As Lucy Fischer's analysis of art deco sets demonstrates, the combination of Busby Berkeley's dances and their art deco *environs* produces 'autonomous designs' that are 'liberated from their narrative logic'. These in turn facilitate a reading of their excessive stylization as more fully expressive of the tensions around modernity in the 1930s than is evident from the more conventional, 'realistic' settings of Astaire–Rogers musicals that also drew on an art deco aesthetic.[11] To take an

5 *Today's Woman*, June 1948, p. 51.

6 Daniel Cathcart, letter to the *New York Times*, 6 October 1946, p. 4.

7 *Hollywood Reporter*, 23 March 1955.

8 *Variety*, 45th Anniversary issue, 3 January 1951.

9 Charles S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History of Film* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 6.

10 Ibid., p. 9.

11 Lucy Fischer, *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco and the Female Form* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 137–48.

example from British cinema, Alfred Junge's designs for *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1947) enhanced elements that were present in the source novel by Rumer Godden (1939), but intensified them to such an extent that they produced an unstable, excessive representation of 'the East' that can be more fully equated with the ideology of Orientalism.[12] This is all the more striking since the film was shot not on location in India but at Leonardslee, a sub-tropical garden in Horsham, Surrey, and in Pinewood Studios. While Godden criticized Junge's evocation of India as 'inauthentic', it nevertheless communicated a highly specific, controlled vision that was coherent in its verisimilar address as an excessive, alien, unsettling environment.[13] Yet in the vivid recreation of India there is a visual parallel with the 'exoticism' of the flashback sequences in Ireland, when Sister Clodagh (Deborah Kerr) remembers a failed love affair before she became a nun, creating a link between the present and past that also serves to collapse binary divisions between East and West in an uncomfortable, yet distinctive manner. This marks the film as a particularly evocative 'end of empire' fiction, all the more so since its release coincided with the India Independence Act, 1947. The sets therefore exceed the letter of the script in a very striking, even contradictory way.[14]

This introduces a key theme in the evaluation of set design, that of authorship. In a desire to expose and elevate the work of designers it is tempting to confer on them the status of *auteur*. With reference to *Black Narcissus* this means trying to create a distinction between Powell, Pressburger and Junge. Yet this approach arguably contains as many pitfalls as its original applicability to directors does as a somewhat limited way to analyze film. As the first article by Laurie Ede demonstrates, the complexities behind the work of designers require a more pragmatic approach that takes more fully into account the designer's role within a particular production context. While looking for consistencies in a designer's approach might be fruitful, for example, in assessing the contribution of more celebrated designers such as Junge, it is not so appropriate for those who worked on many films, in different countries and for a variety of studios/production companies. Rather than assess their performance only with reference to films to which they contributed, it is more productive to analyze their work within a broader, comparative framework that takes into account other prevalent approaches and styles, genres and collaborators. The case of Lazare Meerson is instructive on this issue. While Meerson is most commonly credited as the instigator of French poetic realist cinema, he also designed films in Germany and Britain. While it may seem attractive to evaluate his work solely in relation to poetic realism, analysis of other films on which he collaborated demonstrates the extent to which celebrated designers such as Meerson also excelled at being able to work within particular budgetary constraints, in different studio environments and according to varying national conventions.

12 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

13 Anne Chisholm, *Rumer Godden: a Storyteller's Life* (London: Pan Books, 1999), p. 201.

14 See Sarah Street, *Black Narcissus* (London: IB Tauris, 2005 forthcoming).

As evidence of his adaptability, Meerson worked on historical productions (*La Kermesse Héroïque*, [1935], *Fire Over England* [1937]), contemporary art deco films (*Les Nouveaux Messieurs* [1928], *The Divorce of Lady X* [1938]) and realist dramas (*South Riding* [1938], *The Citadel* [1938]). Designers' collaborations with cinematographers are also of key importance, since the visibility and impact of a particular set depended on the extent and intensity of its illumination; a similar argument could be made in relation to partnerships with costume designers. Separating the designer from the overall context of production is therefore as limiting as isolating the work of the director.

Inevitably, however, dominant styles are associated with particular figures such as Meerson's pupil Alexandre Trauner. Ben McCann shows that French poetic realism depended on a distinctive cinematographic style that was in large part dependent on the efficacy of the sets. Within this context, set designs serve as the staging of 'action spaces' that acquire their meaning in an accumulative relationship that shifts from establishing a general sense of place to a smaller, more commonplace environment that intensifies 'a powerful dramaturgical and symbolic charge'. This 'performative' approach departs from conventional mise-en-scene analysis in that it proposes a dynamic framework of interpreting sets as a *process*, part of a larger whole that takes into account previous frames, locales and events. This links with Deleuze's observation that Renoir's films demonstrate how 'space and action always go beyond the limits of the frame which only takes elements from an area'.[15]

While Ede and McCann deal with the 1930s and 1940s, Damian Sutton discusses the impact on production design of new technologies such as computer-generated imagery (CGI). Just as art directors in the past were concerned with creating persuasive, 'real' environments that satisfied varying generic and social verisimilar codes, it is striking how this approach has been maintained in the use of CGI. In the example of *Band of Brothers* (2001), the 'success' of the recreation of the past depends on CGI's ability to replicate aesthetic codes associated with cinematic realism, for example the artificial creation of hand-held camera effects and desaturated images. While there would appear to be continuity with the past in these terms, the concept of production design has nevertheless shifted to become even more collaborative, since it is dependent on a combination of sets and effects created by computer. The set is therefore not a constructed object in the same way as it was in the past. Drawings and storyboard designs are still important at the conceptual level, however, as demonstrated by Jane Barnwell's discussion of several recent films.[16] The approaches demonstrated in this dossier therefore suggest new ways of taking more fully into account the past and present work of set designers and how to theorize more appropriately the textual operations of sets within film and television narratives.

15 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 16.

16 Jane Barnwell, *Production Design: Architects of the Screen* (London: Wallflower, 2004).

Capital and creativity: some notes on the British film art director of the 1940s

LAURIE EDE

This essay is intended not as an act of deconstruction but of *re*construction. My aim is to reconstruct the industrial and creative environment of British film art direction of the 1940s. I want to reappraise the efforts of some of the eighty-eight designers who designed the sets – and sometimes the entire look – of the 625 features that were made in the approximate decade from the start of World War II through to the start of the 1950s.

Much of the existing writing on British art direction carries an implicit message of subjugation – the British designer is perceived as an underdog of the British studio system. This was only partly true. Certainly, the names of Wilfred Arnold, Duncan Sutherland, Alexander Vetchinsky and other prolific art directors were not widely known. On the other hand, reliable (and even artistic) art directors were valued by film producers. Conspicuously, British art directors felt little need to involve themselves in the industrial campaigns of the ACT during the 1940s. This was because they fared well in terms both of creative input and remuneration. Sometimes designers were key interlocutors of the directors and they were comparatively well paid. The high-profile German designer Alfred Junge received £850 for his contribution to The Archers' *Contraband* (1940), more than twice as much as the photographer Freddy Young, and not far short of the figure received by Emeric Pressburger.[1] At the other end of the scale, even the journeyman R. Holmes-Paul could not complain about the comparatively derisory £75 that he received for Butcher's *Sword of*

1 See Public Records Office, BT 64/114. Emeric Pressburger was paid £1000, Michael Powell £2000. However, it should be noted that the Board of Trade strongly suspected the production company, British National, of inflating the salaries in order to qualify for higher quota.

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Honour (started January 1939), as it was still four times as much as his draughtsmen and assistants were paid.[2]

So British art directors were not underdogs in the expected sense. By the same token, it would be absurd to identify them as defining figures in British film production; the more so given the self-effacing demands of the dominant realist aesthetic. Clearly, any superimposition of *Cahiers*/Sarris-style auteurist analysis would be foolish. We need to find a way of assessing art director creativity that reflects the specificity of their labour in the given place and time. Levels of creative freedom varied in relation to the status of the production and the production company. Consequently, we need to establish the means of assessing art director influence across the various strata of the British film industry of the 1940s. This will be the major task of this article. But this method will only allow us to glean evidence of actual achievement. It will not tell us much about what art directors *wanted* for themselves. To begin to understand this, we need to think briefly about the polemical writings of the leading contemporary theorist of British art direction, Edward Carrick. We should also consider the activities of the art directors' self-made union of the late 1940s, the Society of British Film Art Directors and Designers (SBFAD).

2 See PRO BT 64/112. The total labour costs were £7592.

Indexes of aspiration and achievement

Edward Carrick (1905–98) was the son of the famous theatre set designer Gordon Craig. Carrick's writings, like his father's, were infused with a sense of fury at the missed potential of his chosen medium.[3] Carrick had a prominent career in film design but his contribution to film history has ultimately been based on his passionate descriptions of British film culture. Four notions loomed large in Carrick's three books and eleven articles: *motivation*, *realism*, *continentalism* and *artist power*.

Carrick's writings insisted upon the need for artistic endeavour to be correctly motivated. He insisted that technical excellence could not be regarded as an end in itself, but should be allied to a higher spiritual purpose. Carrick's Blakeian vision of a union between innocence and experience was also reflected in his view of film realism. The sometime colleague of Humphrey Jennings had surprisingly little time for documentary realism; rather, he extolled French poetic realism for its emotional veracity.[4] It was partly this that led Carrick to be an enthusiastic supporter of continental designers in Britain. The cosmopolitan Carrick believed that the famous Europeans who came to England during the 1930s exerted crucial influence over the development of British art direction. For him, Junge and Vincent Korda in particular brought order and flair to British films.

But whatever the gains made in particular by Junge's and Korda's influential 'schools' of design, Carrick's writings expressed a strong desire for greater designer power. Ostensibly, Carrick saw films as a

3 As is well known, Carrick assumed his professional surname in order to distance himself from his family's theatrical traditions. Despite much theatre work, Carrick believed films to be the superior art form.

4 Carrick was art director to the Crown Film Unit during the war, but he did not equate documentary purpose with absolute realism. He praised Cavalcanti and Pimenoff for their understanding of the reciprocal relationship between character and set.

collective enterprise. But he had no doubt that the designer was the natural second-in-command to the director. This zeal for designer control was reflected in Carrick's work on behalf of the Society of British Film Art Directors and Designers.

The SBFAD was incorporated on 30 June 1949 with the ostensible idea (as Carrick wrote) to 'cultivate and improve the pictorial design of British pictures'.[5] However, Carrick, L.P. Williams and the leading figures amongst the thirty-three founder members had a political purpose: they believed that the SBFAD should act as an employment regulator. Williams and Carrick also wanted the SBFAD to act as a bulwark against ACT incursions into the designer's trade. Both of these aims served a wider purpose of establishing art directors as a collective power bloc. Indeed, Carrick's most famous work, *Art and Design in the British Film*, was really intended to promote the SBFAD.[6]

However, Carrick's writings and the SBFAD were ultimately mere models of aspiration. Day-to-day, the biggest concern was the production in-hand, as defined in large part by the employer. For most art directors, this meant the producer. During the 1940s, production companies were divisible into three broad areas, defined by the cost and anticipated function of their films (that is, for domestic or intenational consumption):

Cost bracket	Companies (examples)	Typical productions	Export?
High (£150,000 and above)	IPL companies, Two Cities, LFP[7]	*Henry V* (1944), *The Red Shoes* (1948)	Yes
Medium (£50,000 to £100,000)	Ealing Gainsborough	*Hue and Cry* (1946), *The Wicked Lady* (1945)	Maybe
Low (£50,000 and below)	Butcher's Film Service, British National, Hammer, ABPC	*Room to Let* (1947), *Old Mother Riley* films	No

Carrick's writings and the SBFAD presented an ideal of increased designer influence. But every art director recognized that their chances of expressivity finally depended upon two related factors: personal ability and a suitable opportunity. Space constraints here will not allow a thorough survey of the complex interactions between talent and circumstance, but I can begin to account for designer influence by comparing two productions taken from either end of the British

5 Quote drawn from the handbook of the Society of British Film Art Directors and Designers, in the possession of the author.

6 Edward Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948). The book also accompanied a SBFAD exhibition at the Victoria & Albert museum in London. L.P. Williams led the art department at B&D during the 1930s. In the 1940s, Williams worked in America before becoming technical director to Independent Producers. He continued to design the odd film for Rank, notably *Brief Encounter* (1945).

7 IPL refers to the Independent Producers Limited. Rank's elite companies were: The Archers (Powell and Pressburger), Cineguild, Wessex Films and Gabriel Pascal. Other Rank companies, such as Filippo Del Guidice's Two Cities and Ealing, were embroiled in his prestige experiment at different times. LFP refers here to Alexander Korda's revived London Film Productions.

production spectrum during the 1940s: Cineguild's *Oliver Twist* (1948, art director John Bryan), and ABPC's *Suspected Person* (1943, art director Charles Gilbert).

High-end production: *Oliver Twist*

Oliver Twist was produced by Cineguild, the company owned by the producer Anthony Havelock-Allen, director David Lean and photographer Ronald Neame.[8] In January 1946, following its formal admission into Rank's elite Independent Producers organization, Cineguild constructed its own self-contained production unit. Crucially, this included Britain's most gifted designer, John Bryan.

Bryan first worked as a scenic artist for the theatre, between 1928 and 1933.[9] During this time he met the theatre/film design luminary Laurence Irving, who subsequently took him on as his assistant at Sound City. When Irving left, Bryan became a full art director, designing quota quickies for £7.10s a week. His career then went through two key phases prior to Cineguild. Between 1933 and 1935 he was a key figure in Vincent Korda's art department at Denham. Then in 1943 (after two years spent on camouflage duty) he became supervising art director for the Gainsborough studios. Bryan's brand of cut-price luxury on films such as *The Wicked Lady* (1945) and *Caravan* (1946) promoted him to the highest levels of Rank's technical pool. Every Gainsborough designer knew how to work to budget, but Bryan demonstrated a special feeling for texture, coherence and camera placement.[10]

Bryan was a supreme artist, but he was also dynamic. At Gainsborough, he emulated Junge's habit of marking an 'X' on the studio floor to direct the master shots,[11] but he also made his mark in other ways. During the 1940s, he was known as the master of 'designed [forced] perspective'. Any Bryan set of the period featured perspective elements designed to exploit 'the fact that the camera does lie'.[12] Bryan claimed authorship of the technique, but it had been around for a long time. Lazare Meerson had made celebrated use of forced perspective for Korda on *As You Like It* (1936) and even old stagers, such as R. Holmes-Paul and Andrew Mazzei, regularly designed and built to the vanishing point in order to save space. At Cineguild, Bryan was able to persuade Lean that his forced perspective added emotional value.[13]

Oliver Twist came about as a result of the success of Cineguild's previous Dickens film, *Great Expectations* (1946), which had achieved good returns and had appeared in all of the popularity polls.[14] In addition, Bryan had received an Academy Award for his production design and Wilfrid Shingleton had accepted the same for black-and-white art direction (albeit with a guilty conscience).[15] These plaudits made it inevitable that Cineguild would return to Dickens. It was predictable, too, that Lean et al. would seek a similar visual tone. Bryan

8 Cineguild was formed in July 1943 as the means to film the plays of Noel Coward, under the aegis of Two Cities. The Cineguild–Coward relationship endured for four films: *In Which We Serve* (1942), *This Happy Breed* (1944), *Blithe Spirit* (1945) and *Brief Encounter* (1945). The first and fourth films were designed by David Rawnsley and L.P. Williams respectively. The other two were art directed by C.P. Norman.

9 Bryan (1911–69) was the son of the theatre producer Herbert Bryan.

10 Bryan's design contemporaries at Gainsborough included Alex Vetchinsky, Maurice Carter, Walter Murton and Andrew Mazzei.

11 Like Junge, Bryan knew that this would give the best chance of showing his sets to full advantage. Junge had supervised and personally designed over fifty films for Gaumont-British at Shepherd's Bush and (occasionally) Islington during the 1930s.

12 The two Bryan quotes are both drawn from the profile of him in the journal *Film Industry*, May 1948, p. 18.

13 L.P. Williams, who was technical director to D&P at the time of *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*, saw the perspective sets as profligate acts of self-advertisement on Bryan's part.

14 120,000 people went to see *Great Expectations* during its first two weeks in the West End. See the *Daily Mirror*, 3 January 1947.

15 The former ATP set designer Shingleton felt that he had not performed a creative role on *Great Expectations*. Years later, Carrick reported to the Guild of Film Art Directors that Shingleton felt he had 'no right' to the award. E. Carrick. undated letter to the GFAD, contained in a file of correspondence relating to the SBFAD in the possession of the author.

strove to derive the maximum emotional value from his key references: Victorian illustrators and cartoonists of London such as Cruikshank, Hogarth, Phiz and Doré. Inevitably, these were combined with his innate feeling for expressionism to form a queasy impression of Dickens.

Doré's work was the primary reference for *Oliver Twist*, particularly his 1872 collection of engravings, *London, a Pilgrimage*. There were pros and cons to Bryan's use of Doré. *Pilgrimage* was around forty years out of period for the film, but Cineguild believed that Doré's London corresponded with public expectations of a Dickensian milieu.[16] Bryan's sets often quoted Doré closely. For example, the divine long-shot of the exterior of Fagin's hideaway placed against St Paul's echoed Doré's view of St Paul's as seen from the Barclay and Perkins brewery.

Otherwise, *Oliver Twist* furthered Irving's ideal, as distilled by Bryan, of 'script design'; a script accompanied by thumbnail sketches. The opening scenes, picturing Oliver's mother's trek to the poorhouse, were planned in great detail. Each sketch was accompanied (as was the case also on *Great Expectations*) by a storyline.[17] These verbal cues emphasized the importance of the sets to the drama and effectively enabled Bryan to determine the emotional register.

Oliver Twist was also remarkable for its set construction methods. Fittingly, *Great Expectations* had been constructed as a *bildungsroman* predicated on point-of-view shots (the audience 'became' Pip at key moments), but Lean required an expanded vista for *Oliver Twist*. Bryan thereby created exhilarating backdrops from scenic art, spare plastic elements and Neame's 'cloudglass' system.[18] But he took great care to contrast these with claustrophobic elements, including photographically-challenging ceilings for the interiors. These performed a dual function: they signalled the essential ambiguity of Dickens's London, and the setting contrasts between frames created a subliminal sense of movement. As ever, Bryan was alert to the ways in which inanimate sets could suggest motion.

The Dickens films were Cineguild's most ambitious productions and they provided Bryan with his most expansive opportunities. No other art director could have applied himself so completely to the task. Carrick observed that Bryan was 'a rather romantic stylist',[19] and indeed he clearly approached *Oliver Twist* with an open heart. In this way, he disabused the audience of its awareness of the film medium and powerfully figured the terror and beauty of the sublime.

Low-end production: *Suspected Person*

Carrick felt that the tragedy of British films was that they were never 'secure enough to sustain Independent Producers'.[20] To Carrick, IPL was a friend to the genuine artist (such as Junge and Bryan). Also, he believed that The Archers, Cineguild and cohorts could help to raise

16 IPL's historical adviser Peter Hunt averred: 'We go to Mayhew for facts. We go to Doré for an interpretation.' See his article on *Oliver Twist* in *Dickensian*, vol. 44, no.2 (1948).

17 Bryan's sketches are reproduced in E. Carrick, 'The influence of the graphic artist on films', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 24 March 1950, p. 371.

18 Cineguild's 'cloudglass' was a device used for creating sky effects photographically. It was an elaborate mirror projection system comprising eight mirrors and three lenses. See *Kineweekly*, 20 December 1945.

19 E. Carrick, 'The artist and the film', *Studio*, December 1951.

20 E. Carrick, conversation with the author, 18 January 1993.

audience expectations of films. In this way, Rank's prestige experiment could even serve in the long run to eradicate the kinds of artistic degradations faced by Charles Gilbert, the chief art director to the Associated British Picture Corporation.

ABPC knew its place. Some upturn in production ambitions was observable after 1943, when its American backer Warner's decided to spend frozen war effects. But prior to this point, ABPC exemplified the lowest tier of British production, satisfying itself with the predictable returns from routine programme-fillers. The 1938 *Cinematograph Films Act* encouraged only a moderate upturn in production spend as the company continued to produce films on eight-week schedules for £15,000 a throw.[21]

ABPC liked to portray itself as the realist concern; the company that (as their slogan had it) made 'Down to Earth Pictures' on sustainable budgets. But it was an organizational disaster, and the art department suffered particularly badly. During the 1930s, the department was arranged – or rather misarranged – by Clarence Elder. Elder was a buffoon and a bully. He habitually donned an artist's smock when receiving underlings, as if to underscore his superiority, but he knew little about art and less about filmmaking. Elder's art department was marked by a lack of pre-planning and the frequent absence of senior art department figures (one even set up an informal office in a nearby pub). At the same time, some art directors – such as Cedric Dawe – were forced to work extreme hours in order to keep up with the production schedule.

The Elstree/Welwyn art department improved somewhat following Elder's call-up in 1939, and Dawe, John Mead and Charles Gilbert attempted to instil some order. However, a sense of improvization still endured for the better part of the decade, particularly after Mead and Dawe were also absorbed into the war effort. Gilbert was exempted from military service. Dawe's former assistant therefore became head of the ABPC art department, at its remaining facility at Welwyn. (ABPC's main studios at Elstree were commandeered for use as a supply depot in 1940).

Suspected Person (started February 1942) was a typical Gilbert assignment. This thriller featured several eloquent sets, which were sensitively photographed by ABPC's star technician Gunther Krampf.[22] But the overall effect was marred – as was often the case with lowest-tier British productions – by the poor textual qualities of the minor sets.

Suspected Person made exhaustive demands of Welwyn's meagre resources. The story required locations as diverse as Scotland Yard, Holyhead and a log cabin in the Rockies – tricky in a studio with a total floor area of just 15,368 square feet.[23] Gilbert implied a great deal: many locations were represented by telephone boxes, taking up nearly 5% of the screentime, with 13 different receivers shown! Gilbert also attempted to boost the scenic profile of the film by focusing most attention on the major sets of The Three Sailors pub and Joan's

21 See A. Wood, *Mr Rank* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), p. 106. See also R. Acland and E. Grant, *The Celluloid Mistress* (London: Allen Wingate, 1954), p. 130.

22 The German Krampf (1899–1950) was much admired by British art directors, who recalled his famous work on *Pandora's Box* (1929) and *The Student of Prague* (1926). In Britain, he worked mainly for Gaumont-British and ABPC.

23 This could be compared with the 30,768 square feet available at Shepherd's Bush. None of the Welwyn stages was as big as the smallest at Denham.

guesthouse. These were both effective settings, which underscored the film's contrast of civilized and covert society. Joan's (Patricia Roc) guesthouse was noted for its architectural coherence and also for its detail. As with his farmhouse of *The Farmer's Wife* (started August 1940) Gilbert built the ground floor of the guesthouse as a composite. This assisted the realism of the set and also enabled quick camera set-ups. Gilbert's guesthouse for *Suspected Person* additionally benefited from its attention to small details such as the Yale lock on Joan's door, suggesting her quest for privacy within a multi-occupancy dwelling.

The welcoming and modern guesthouse made an effective contrast with the specious world of The Three Sailors. The saloon walls were decorated with twee nautical prints to signal the respectable face of the pub. However, the decrepit furnishings in the private area beyond (torn chaise-longue and dirty wallpaper) demonstrated the landlord's removal from respectable society. Ingeniously, Gilbert also included damp wallpaper to suggest the proximity of this smugglers' haunt to the docks.

Joan's apartment house and the pub succeeded on their own terms, but the other sets suffered from poor finishing. The Aladdin Club was particularly bland, despite some suitably pretentious Chinese lamps. It was Gilbert's lot at ABPC to suffer such oversights. The ABPC management did not worry about *Suspected Person*'s tonal inconsistencies – for them, the film did its job and Gilbert did his job within it. More expansive design opportunities came later on when Elstree was reinstated and when further US money was released; but not for Gilbert. His career proceeded as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. The cheapskate ABPC flicks earmarked him as a budget designer. Gilbert went on to art direct similarly unpretentious fare for Butcher's, Nettlefold and other habitues of the lowest tiers of British film production.

Evaluating creativity

Of necessity, this has been a brief survey of art direction in a given place and time. Nonetheless, some conclusions can be drawn. To begin with, it seems obvious that Carrick and the SBFAD's vision of greater designer influence did not mature. It may well have been the case, as Carrick suggested, that 'the English, particularly the *commercial* part of the industry, didn't know anything about artists'.[24] But, as Carrick also recognized, the British film industry did not *need* to know about artists. Mainly what producers needed – then as now – was a grasp of public taste and a sense of where the market was heading. In addition, it was helpful for the producer to know his place. Gainsborough's and British National's achievements in being the top two production companies of the period were attributable to their understanding of niche marketing.

But it is precisely these wider determinants of creativity that make

24 E. Carrick, conversation with the author, 18 January 1993.

art direction such a rewarding area of study. If one makes the effort to create a genuinely coalescent model of institutional and economic determinants, some interesting points start to emerge. Sets at the high end – such as those for *Oliver Twist, Black Narcissus* (1947) or *Henry V* (1944) – become all the more laudatory as symbols of a time of unparalleled creative freedom for a chosen few. At the same time, one can celebrate achievements at the cheap end. Designers were often the people in the studios who assumed most responsibility for making ends meet. On these terms, a film such as *Suspected Person* or John Argyle's *Once a Sinner* (started September 1949, art director G. Paterson) provide solid evidence of the indomitable nature of creativity.

'A discreet character?' Action spaces and architectural specificity in French poetic realist cinema

BEN MCCANN

It was Léon Barsacq who once wrote, playfully and pertinently, that film decor was 'a discreet character, yet also the director's most devoted accomplice'.[1] Barsacq clearly understood that set design could not only define the film's visual ambience but was also an architecture imbued with meaning. Decor is never a silent shell, standing detached from the action, but instead possesses a powerful dramaturgical and symbolic charge. The overall design of a film – how it organizes and presents the various settings of its fictional world – is fundamental in aligning the spectator's perspective. Nothing is ever superfluous, and the figural dimensions of everyday decor fragments are foregrounded so that a window or door may anthropomorphize into a powerful visual signifier. This function of architecture-as-resonator is constantly explored in 1930s French poetic realist cinema.[2] Not only are key works like *Le Quai des brumes* (Marcel Carné, 1938), *La Bête humaine* (Jean Renoir, 1938) and *Le Jour se lève* (Marcel Carné, 1939) strongly anchored to recognizable, usually urban, landscapes, they also rely heavily on atmospheric milieux and spatial specifics to explore deeper levels of meaning embedded in the narrative.

This particular strand of 1930s French decor is deemed inherently performative, whereby a reciprocal transfer between individual and decor acts as an interpretative matrix for each film. It is a decor that 'speaks', paraphrasing the narrative's concerns and architecturally reflecting the emotions and mental states of the individuals inhabiting them. Accustomed to painted backcloths and flimsy balsa-wood

1 Léon Barsacq, *Le Décor de film* (Paris: Seghers, 1970), p. 101. My translation.

2 A highly problematic term, due in part to its overlapping generic and textual qualities, French poetic realist cinema can be broadly defined as a cinematic style that combined populist narratives with an accentuated visual style. The 'realism' stemmed from the subject matter; the 'poetic' from the subject matter's treatment. For further elucidation, see Dudley Andrew's masterly *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995)

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constructions, critics now applauded the structural authenticity of the decor, arguing that the way it reflected the action and was organically assimilated into the narrative accounted for poetic realism's specificity. Rather than what Sandy Flitterman-Lewis has called 'the culturally anonymous decors of the mass-produced cinematic spectacle',[3] poetic realist decor depended upon creating architecture with emotional possibilities, whereby the design fragment motivated the staging.

3 Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 180.

Action spaces

The starting point to this discussion of the performativity of individual design fragments in poetic realism crystallizes around a concept I term the 'action space'. Broadly speaking, this is a space that embodies sites of conflict, both narrative and emotional, and becomes an important structuring metaphor in the differentiation of people and places in the cinema. More importantly, the action space assumes a stark narrative privilege. Architectural imagery and the articulation of space create the basic dramatic and choreographic rhythm of any film, and those directors who identify the most potent encounters of architecture will invest them with a powerful transformative power. The action space originates from an adherence to the basic architectural code of structure and function, and once established shifts from simple built space to exert a totalizing effect on the narrative. In other words, the very meaning of the film lies embedded in the space in which the action takes place. Like the novelist, the set designer builds up a mosaic of sense impressions that complement the action and provide oblique comment on the wider concerns of the narrative. German expressionist designer Hans Poelzig once noted how it was possible to express in the facade of a structure 'all the dynamic, ecstatic, fantastic and pathetic elements which constitute the psychic nature of the life within that structure.'[4] This appropriation of architecture to exert a strong influence on the spectator and express a deeper, more nuanced reading of the narrative is reminiscent of Dickens's most celebrated writing that relied constantly on the mood and atmosphere of a claustrophobic London landscape. In 1930s French cinema, these sense impressions and objectification of inner experience through architectural shapes typify the working methods of both Marcel Carné and Jean Renoir.

4 In Neil Reynolds, 'The Architecture of silents: an investigation of German film design 1919–1926' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Nottingham, 1993), p. 44. Poelzig was best known for designing *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (1920).

In their work, haphazard architectural configurations and foregrounded design fragments allow emotions to be immediately evoked. By privileging basic design fragments, Carné and Renoir can influence a reading of the film and metaphorize the narrative concerns. Ultimately then, the careful selection and assimilation of recognizable design fragments becomes crucial in amplifying the narrative and imbuing the film with an expressive, disassociative or verisimilitudinous look.

In poetic realist films, these action spaces range from the general to the specific: on the one hand a courtyard or city street can constitute an

action space; on the other, the director may seek to use a site-specific action space, such as a staircase, window or bridge, to intensify the narrative and aesthetic effect. What is certain in the films of this period is that the action space concept tends to crystallize around enclosed pockets of community rather than recognizable city symbols. Carné's and Renoir's Paris is neither touristic nor monumental – there are very few shots, for instance, of the Eiffel Tower or Arc de Triomphe in their films – because both directors concentrate more intensely on the constituent action spaces which metonymize the city and explore human interaction within smaller spatial configurations. When the viewer is granted privileged shots of Parisian landmarks, they are generally brief pictorial imports or *découvertes* that set the scene before a dissolve into a smaller 'action space'. In *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (Jean Renoir, 1936), when Charles (Maurice Baquet) cycles back to the courtyard to deliver copies of 'Arizona Jim', there is the image of the Arc de Triomphe in the background. The scene is simply an establishing shot, and the fact that Charles is cycling away from it implies the monument's narrative transience. For Carné and Renoir, the cafe or courtyard is Paris, and by offering themselves up as the crucible for the narrative, these action spaces imply a wider significance. To this extent, it is the intimate, anti-touristic 'action space' which functions metonymically for the universal urban experience.

Often in film, place can be less crucial to narrative pleasure than character or action, but the key poetic realist films of the 1930s foreground staircases, bridges, windows and work-places as the privileged site of the person–environment nexus. They assume particular importance because they are both fundamental in sustaining the film's reality effect and providing signifiers to various personal and communal identities. Writing about the fusion of architecture and community in Naples, Walter Benjamin concluded that:

> buildings and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades and stairways ... to become a theatre of the new ... this is how architecture, the most binding part of the communal rhythm comes into being here ... each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of communal life.[5]

5 In Guiliana Bruno, 'City views: the voyage of film images', in David B. Clarke (ed.), *The Cinematic City* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 49.

In 1930s French cinema, the sites of this 'communal rhythm' can be classified as cafes, bars, hotels and courtyards. These action spaces are redolent with meaning: when the architecture and the narrative mingle, endless currents of communal rhythm are established and maintained, and the intensification of the relationship between a space's architecture and the individuals within creates a stronger sense of community. The importance of the action space stems from its commonality – its architectural homogeneity (one bar looks much the same as another in 1930s French cinema with Byrrh, Dubonnet and the *zinc* always foregrounded) and the recurrence of stock characters (irascible *patron*, world-weary *ouvrier*, friendly *gendarme*). Through

this powerful combination of familiarity and community, these action spaces become the sites of nostalgia, drama and spectacle. These recurring architectonic motifs create a succession of natural theatres, a particularly apt term given the intrinsic performativity ascribed to such spaces. Staircases and courtyards are intermediate locations that link together the private sphere of an apartment or hotel room with the wider public ones of cafes, cabarets and workplaces. They are also dramaturgical spaces where important individual or community performances are played out. Their naturalness is rooted in intimacy and simplicity. Stock characters are strongly bound to these spaces (for they assume metonymic functions as the extension of a certain working-class Parisian *quartier*) and are rarely seen *chez eux*; instead, family rituals invariably take place within the wider community space.[6] Ultimately, given that several key 1930s French films contain one or more of these *loci classicus*, examining and exploring action space may represent a new way in which a spectator may 'read' a film that differs from more conventional techniques of sequence analysis such as performance, dialogue or editing.

6 This trend has continued throughout recent French cinema, most notably in *Marius et Jeanette* (Robert Guédiguian, 1997) and *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001).

Action spaces in *Le Jour se lève*

To look at *Le Jour se lève* through the optic of architectural representation is one method of exploring the notion of the action space. This film's architectonics encapsulate some of the more general performative properties of set design; indeed, the recurrence of *Le Jour se lève* throughout discussions of French set design is indicative of the film's rich decor and its canonization as poetic realism's most enduring and discussed film. Anchored to a seemingly recognizable and verisimilitudinous urban landscape, this Carné-directed and Alexandre Trauner-designed film emotionalizes architecture and invests it with a strong performative presence. Trauner sought to distil a visual concept from the thematic and psychological concerns of Jacques Prévert's screenplay, and this interface between story and style is characterized by a rhythmic recurrence of decor fragments and action spaces. What Trauner achieved was the releasing of the performative from the static. He took inanimate decor and made it not just the spectatorial focal point but also a central actor in the drama. He was necessarily aware that the sets formed one constituent of the mise-en-scene, but was likewise appreciative of decor's intrinsic performativity and evocative power in reconstituting half-forgotten places.

The apartment building in *Le Jour se lève* – perhaps the most instantly recognizable built set in 1930s French cinema – gives a clear indication of the performativity of action spaces. The opening intertitles introduce us to François (Jean Gabin) 'enfermé, assiegé dans une chambre' ('locked away and besieged in his room'). After having killed a man, François has barricaded himself into his room at the top of an apartment block. The set is immediately made significant by

The most recognizable set in 1930s French cinema. *Le Jour se lève* (Marcel Carné, 1939).

Trauner's design scheme. By being constructed at the confluence of three streets, the apartment block is foregrounded as the key action space for the film, becoming a site of spectacle not only for the viewer but also for the diegetic community. Its monumentality is heightened by the fact that it is the only tall building in the frame, it is located at a junction (thus automatically increasing its spatial prominence), and it towers over the largely denuded townscape, imbuing the construction with an almost surreal aura. The image also introduces the feeling of domination by decor in the film, where, as a result of their geometric placing, the actors seem constantly at the mercy of this building. From the outset, the apartment block is configured as the focal point for the audience. David Thomson wrote that Hitchcock insisted upon 'sets that fit the other definition of the word – rigid, enclosing, as with traps that are set'.[7] Trauner's sets throughout the film are like 'traps that are set' because they architecturally represent a hermetically sealed space. It was Trauner who persuaded the producers of *Le Jour se lève* that François needed to be isolated on the fifth floor of the apartment block. The original plan was to have had François living on the first floor, but this would have dissipated all elements of suspense and isolation and would scarcely have provided an adequate architectural signifier for François's mental state.[8]

The interior of the *immeuble* is also loaded with architectural signifiers. The staircase is a powerful action space in the film, perpetuating the privileged role stairs and staircases have traditionally played in cinematic dramaturgy. As the symbolic spine of the house, they are what might be termed 'plastically symbolic' insofar as they are constructed linking devices that enable the transferral of character movement onto the decor. When Carné's camera shoots down five

7 David Thomson, 'The art of the art director', *American Film*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1977), p. 18.

8 When the film was inevitably remade in Hollywood by Anatole Litvak in 1947 as *The Long Night*, set designer Eugène Lourié constructed an apartment block in which the François character (Henry Fonda) lived on the first floor. Trauner attributed the failure of the film to this architectural decision, which neither corresponded to the narrative trajectory nor to Fonda's psychological state.

flights of the winding staircase after the murder, the resulting tunnel image is an exact spatial reflection of François's vertiginous state of mind. The staircase may suggest a notion of community, of linking levels together, but this shot metaphorizes François's lack of social cohesion. In a flashback sequence, the camera tracks down the side of the staircase, following him as he walks out of his room to the front door below. François may whistle contentedly here, making polite conversation to the other residents, but by the time of the murder, the staircase has assumed a kind of malignant presence, explicitly codified by having Jules Berry roll hideously down it after he has been shot.

Doors play an equally definite role in the film. Not only is a door the physical embodiment of characters' comings-and-goings, it is also a prospective gateway, hinting at another entrance or exit, and another, and so on until the architectural simplicity of one room transmutes into an aggregate of spatial possibilities and layered depths. The murder is committed behind a closed door, and when the police threaten to storm François's room, he barricades himself in by pushing a large wardrobe against the door. Doors have an insistent presence in Carné's narratives, and their ubiquity hints at an ever-evolving transition not just from functional objects to poetic markers of passage, but also to an increased understanding of a character's own emotional development.

The window is also an important action space in poetic realism, and is prominent in *Le Jour se lève*. Windows are examples of architectural editors, hiding or revealing key points of the narrative. For Carné, windows are places of communication between private and public, between what is hidden and what is shown. When François first visits Françoise (Jacqueline Laurent), the camera follows him not through the door, but tracks alongside the house to frame them behind the window, immortalizing the couple kissing behind glass. Barricaded in his room, François recalls happier days by gazing out of the window, while the confrontation between him and the rest of his working-class community is conducted with François at the window, shouting hysterically down to them. Indeed, the problematics of 'leaving the window' is a key theme in 1930s poetic realism, insofar as it implies an extension of the interface between private and public. It is only by leaving the window, by venturing out into the world, that the collision between individual and overwhelming social forces can be addressed and resolved.

An equally prominent action space is François's room within the apartment. In the room, Trauner achieved a releasing of the symbolic inherent in everyday decor and effected a sequence of poetic resonances. Many of the props, furniture and assorted paraphernalia function in the same way as the other action spaces: by performing in the narrative their performativity is heightened. Those props and furniture that viewers recall from the film have been dramatized in the course of the narrative: the photographs on the wall symbolize a lost past, the wardrobe pushed against the door acts as a metaphorical barricade against the rest of society, and the teddy bear with 'one sad

The mirror as action space. *Le Jour se lève* (Marcel Carné, 1939).

eye and one happy eye' is an extension of François's own character. What is also interesting to note is the smashing of the mirror by the gun-fire, a classic example of fractured identity, and the way in which local architecture becomes part of the battleground – the window is smashed by the bullets and the police clamber over roofs to position themselves. Throughout these bedroom sequences, Trauner's entire design scheme has been appropriated by the narrative, alternating between the general action space of the room and more explicit embodiments of conflict and paraphrase in the objects within the room.

The action spaces throughout *Le Jour se lève* corroborate the notion that architecture can exert a strong influence on the spectator and express a more nuanced reading of the narrative. In poetic realism, action spaces can range from the general to the specific: on the one hand, a city street or apartment; on the other, a more site-specific decor fragment which intensifies the narrative and aesthetic effects.[9] In all cases, the concept of the action space is a possible starting point in foregrounding methodological questions around the topic of decor analysis, examining the role of the designer in ways that move beyond narrow conceptual models based on theories of authorship, and exploring the fruitful conjunction between start persona and set design.

The aim of this article is to introduce one strand of the performative tendency of set design by concentrating on the notion of the action space. A stylized, studio-bound, usually urban environment can enable an intensification of emotional development and function as amplifier of the story. The successful action space will combine the functionalism of the original decor with an often hallucinatory quality to provide a denser, more richly textured interpretation of the mise-en-scene.

9 This is especially true in the bedroom scenes, where the interaction of light, shadow and darkness in the action space creates a powerful aesthetic effect, referring back to the interplay in German expressionism between light and decor.

A more intimate reality. *Le Jour se lève* (Marcel Carné, 1939).

Graham Greene writes how the best French directors had always been those who possessed 'the trick of presenting a more intimate reality'.[10] This 'intimate reality' typifies poetic realist decor and, more explicitly, the action space – a verisimilitudinous design scheme grounded in architectural orthodoxy aligned to the accentuation of the decor with personal flourishes and symbolic punctuations that allowed for a stronger visual sense and a more profound viewing experience.

In poetic realism architecture acquires an emotional sense through a kind of poetic process, whereby anonymous action spaces and common settings are converted into a visual metaphor for the spectator. Cinema and architecture (as all art) function as alluring projection screens for our emotions. Even a building devoid of any intrinsic quality or worth obliges us to lend our emotions and place them inside it. Because the legibility of a city image is precisely what allows it to become a powerful basis for affective associations, it follows that how the city dweller interprets what is put before her/him will in turn determine her/his relationship to that particular urban space. Likewise, what the poetic realist set effects is the emotionalizing of architecture, where basic design fragments are imbued with a capacity to evoke distinctive audience responses. Walter Benjamin once argued that anyone who concentrates on a work of art for long enough is absorbed by it – in poetic realism, it is by concentrating on prosaic decor elements that the spectator can absorb the stylistic and the decorative. This harmonization of architecture-as-functionalism and architecture-as-decoration permitted 1930s poetic realist films to achieve this synthesis of the banal (a building in a denuded urban space) and the poetic (that building symbolizing a multitude of emotional correspondences), and force the spectator to look at commonplace decor in a transformed light.

10 Graham Greene, *Hôtel du Nord, The Spectator*, 23 June 1939, reprinted in John Russell Taylor (ed.), *The Pleasure-Dome. The Collected Film Criticism of Graham Greene: 1935–1940* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), p. 229.

The DreamWorks effect: the case for studying the ideology of production design

DAMIAN SUTTON

The spell of imitation may easily overtake us so that we abandon ourselves to unreliable authorities.[1]

1 W.J. Verdenius, *Mimesis: Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and its Meaning to Us* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1949), p. 23.

It should come as no surprise that the role of production design in historical film and television revisits old problems of representing real spaces and events – how to combine a credible historical image with the obvious elements of mythic or spectacular narrative central to each production's success. In the television series *Band of Brothers* (HBO/BBC/Playtone, 2001), for example, the central premiss of using the testimonies of living war veterans to underpin the dramatization of their experiences puts pressure on the show's production design (or art direction) to show an ethical responsibility as well as creating something that is dramatic and engaging. The show can be seen as an example of one of the oldest tests of realism and verisimilitude.

Recent DreamWorks projects – *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, Paramount, 1998), *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, Scott Free/Universal, 2000), *Road to Perdition* (Sam Mendes, 20th Century Fox, 2002) and *Band of Brothers* – are illustrative of an approach to the past in which events are conveyed via participation, motivation and apparent 'honesty' to period setting and lived experiences. The DreamWorks 'effect' has been to give the impression of events unfolding autonomously and in which the camera often acts on behalf of us, 'motivated' as if by our desired presence. Introduced in *Saving Private Ryan* and developed in *Band of Brothers*, these strategies

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promise a *veridical realism* – an appearance of events and their setting as true to life and there to be discovered or revealed by the camera.

The Platonic test

Issues of realism have had new currency since the late-1990s, when digital post-production techniques (computer-generated imagery – CGI) became industry standard in historical reconstruction.[2] Before CGI, the limitations of a production's budget could be measured by its attention to detail on set. Now, as a matter of routine, 'physical' objects can be placed in the image, often with apparent precision, if they are too expensive to create practically. Ontologically, the creation of both a realistic and meaningful space in cinema has shifted to the two-dimensional image, yet that image must appear to have been filmed in the real three-dimensional world. Attention was diverted momentarily from the relationship visual culture has with photography in general. Prior to this, however, in the early 1980s, the Czech philosopher Vilém Flusser had already fired a warning shot above any photography debate on representation:

> Images are mediations between the world and human beings. ... They are supposed to be maps but turn into screens: Instead of representing the world, they obscure it until human beings' lives finally become a function of the images they create.[3]

Flusser's argument can be seen as essentially Platonic, in that high claims for artistic imitation should be treated with suspicion, and certainly not trusted as being connected to the 'real' things that they represent. Here, mimetic art is redundant at best and deceitful at worst: 'such representations definitely harm the minds of their audiences, unless they're inoculated against them by knowing their real nature'.[4]

Stephen Halliwell has suggested that Plato's attack on art is in fact a critique of the 'look of the real', a 'dialectical gambit' or challenge made to later thinkers to demonstrate the worth of dramatic representation or mimesis.[5] This proposes the notion of a 'Platonic test', or challenge, that is not a test of veracity but one of character. Representation must appear to resist the 'spell of imitation', as described by W.J. Verdenius, and defend itself in its own content ('in lyric or other metre').[6] Flusser's Platonic approach is useful because it provides a bridge between the discussions of process and of intention in CGI. As Jim Morris, chief executive of Industrial Light & Magic explains, 'creative people see a movie like 'Gladiator' and realize that they can now make the movie they've always wanted to make'.[7] Such promises of CGI encourage directors to attempt conceptual experimentation, all the while demanding realism. These make the pressures of dramatic mimesis – the Platonic test – all the more acute.

2 See Scott McQuire, 'Digital dialetics: the paradox of cinema in a studio without walls', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1999), pp. 379–97. See also Peter Lunenfeld, 'Art post-history: digital photography and electronic semiotics', in Amlunxen et al. (eds), *Photography After Photography: Memory and Representation in the Digital Age*, (Munchen: G+B Arts, 1996), pp. 92–8.

3 Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983), trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion, 2000), pp. 9–10.

4 Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 336.

5 Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 137–42.

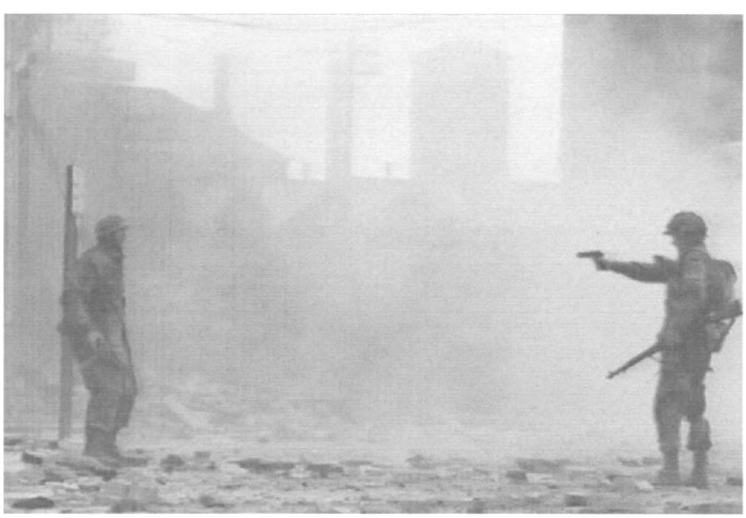
6 Plato, *The Republic*, p. 351.

7 Marc Graser, 'H'W'D's new toga party', *Variety*, 2–8 September 2002, pp. 1, 53.

'Dropping a documentary unit into the past'

Band of Brothers, the story of the 101th Airborne, 506th, Easy Company during the war in Europe, was a ten-hour miniseries costing HBO, Playtone and the BBC over $120 million (plus $15 million on advertising). The series successfully combined cinema and television production techniques. Initiated by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, and using the successful DreamWorks picture *Saving Private Ryan* as a visual template, the series had budget and production values comparable with any major cinema blockbuster, but also involved experienced television directors such as David Nutter and David Leland. Based on Stephen E. Ambrose's bestseller, the show boasted exhaustive research into the period from both a military and a personal perspective. This included viewing existing footage of conditions in the European campaign as well as conducting interviews with the surviving veterans of Easy Company, many of whom are portrayed in the series. These vignettes, used to introduce each episode, interpolate one of the key elements of historical documentary television: personal testimony recorded directly or reenacted. Finally, the series was shot on 35mm film and then converted at Kodak's Cinesite location in London into high-definition video for international television distribution. *Band of Brothers* is significant in the development of CGI in the painstaking treatment undertaken of handheld footage to create a documentary aesthetic similar to that of *Saving Private Ryan*. The series' two-million feet of rushes, the majority hand-held, were digitally altered to give the appearance of 'dropping a documentary unit into the past' – a stylistic idiom commonly used by the series' production team to explain its overall look.[8]

8 Jean Oppenheimer, 'Close combat', *American Cinematographer* (September 2001), p. 33. See also: *'Band of Brothers*: an epic for the small screen' – Kodak in-house webzine, *In Camera*, July 2001. URL: http://www.kodak.com/US/en/motion/newsletters/inCamera/oct2001/brothers.shtml [13 July 2004].



***Band of Brothers* (HBO/BBC/Playtone, 2001) DreamWorks SKG. © Home Box Office.**

... to be there

This overall production aesthetic illustrates the context of contemporary production design. The idea of production design was envisaged as a departure from the day-to-day set design and set dressing duties of art directors under the studio system of the 1930s and 1940s.[9] It was at this time that the general idea of 'three-cornered production planning' – director, cinematographer, and art director (now usually termed 'production designer') – came to be seen as a way forward in '"designing" productions'.[10] This overall design did little to allay the tension between style and realism that had existed in the studio days. This has led Beverly Heisner to describe contemporary US production design as a 'used reality', judged on its fitness for purpose and therefore closer to the general idea of *design* than the rather vaguer notion of 'art' direction.[11]

The production designer is often still subordinate to the studio front-office, and for *Band of Brothers*, it was not production designer Anthony Pratt but executive producer Tom Hanks who dictated the production style – and particularly its documentary aesthetic.[12] The idea of production design as a 'used reality' – Colin MacCabe's 'the real as articulated'[13] – fits the role of CGI well, since CGI is predominantly judged by standards of mainstream narration. In this way, CGI closely followed the camera movements established during the studio system.[14] Production design helped establish the dominance of such 'locked off' camera positions – the dolly, crane, or fixed shot – in mainstream cinema, especially in special effects. For example, the 'locked-off' camera is crucial to one of the staples of special effects films, the matte painting, which sits above and in front of foreground action whilst representing background vistas, a process still in use to this day, even in CGI effects films such as *Gladiator*.[15] The first computer interventions into cinematography largely came in motion-control, the computerization of these camera positions and movements for optical special effects.[16]

As CGI imitates cinematography in effect as well as in production, the basic principles of cinematic transparency should carry between both. Scott McQuire and Lev Manovich both point to the use of CGI to mimic the cinematic camera so that 'objects look as if they might have been filmed'.[17] *Band of Brothers* uses this feature of photographic mimeses several times in the series, most obviously in its title sequences, which include 'snapshots' of the cast in character and 'damaged' war photography of them in action. This notion of camera mimesis relies upon the transparency of photography that is only revealed by its limitations or its flaws. Surface damage and film grain reveal the physical nature of the materials, and lens flare or unwanted reflection reveal the camera in the act of photographing. All provide the element of Barthes's 'that has been', so crucial to our common

9 See John Hambley and Patrick Downing, *Thames Television's the Art of Hollywood* (London: Thames Television, 1979); Beverly Heisner, *Hollywood Art: Art Direction in the Days of the Great Studios* (Chicago, IL and London: St James Press, 1990).

10 Gordon Wiles, 'Let's design pictures for the camera', *American Cinematographer* (August 1941), p. 366.

11 Beverly Heisner, *Production Design in Contemporary American Film*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997), p. 7.

12 Richenda Wilson, 'Action man meets cutting edge digital effects in Steven Spielberg's blockbuster war series, Band of Brothers', *Creative Review* (September 2001), p. 65.

13 Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the cinema: notes on some Brechtian theses', *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1974), pp. 7–9.

14 Wiles 'Let's design pictures for the camera', p. 367.

15 Kevin H. Martin, 'A cut above', *Cinefex*, no. 82 (July 2000), p. 27.

16 Sean Cubitt has described this as the 'single most important aspect of digital cinema'. See Cubitt, 'Digital filming and special effects', in Dan Harries (ed.), *The New Media Book* (2002), p. 24.

17 Scott McQuire, 'Digital dialetics', pp. 189–90; Lev Manovich, 'The paradoxes of digital photography', in Amlunxen et al. (eds), *Photography After Photography*, p. 58.

conception of the photographic image.[18] Analogous in many ways to what Walter Benjamin describes as the 'unconscious optics' of experience, these depict a unified space through the employment of techniques that establish the camera's invisibility, despite doing so in a way that no camera can optically replicate.[19]

Whilst this essentially reinforces the camera's role in the classical narrative system, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Gladiator* and *Band of Brothers* exhibit a tendency to use the camera as a visible presence and apparently motivated by a desire to be there. This principle is more developed in action sequences, where it replicates documentary camerawork – apparently free from restrictions and held by someone within the action. For example, in a scene in which Easy company advance on the Normandy town of Carentan, the camera follows the advance party as they are fired upon. Several soldiers fall as others take cover. In this sequence the movement of the primary camera is erratic and apparently motivated by the same fear that grips the fictional characters.[20] In cutting between this camera and one closing in on the face of the shocked company CO, the sequence places the viewer within the action as well as making them a spectator to it. The 'liveness' here threatens to break the illusory effect since it always threatens to reveal the production set.[21] Borrowing this documentary aesthetic establishes a *veridical realism*, in that it relies upon the *lifelike* appearance of events as happening, or unfolding, independently of a subjective camera. Events once presented *as if photographed* now appear to *present themselves as there to be photographed*: Barthes' 'that has been' is now *to be there.*[22]

'The 'more genuine' the colours ...'

The hand-held camera presents a problem in CGI because of the sheer amount of work required in post-production, particularly the laborious process of hand-tracking across each shot. Whilst digital technology undoubtedly makes this more achievable than previous optical

***Band of Brothers* (HBO/BBC/ Playtone, 2001) DreamWorks SKG. © Home Box Office.**

18 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 115.

19 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' (1936), in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 239.

20 Oppenheimer, 'Close combat', p. 33.

21 Walter Benjamin, 'A short history of photography' (1931), in *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1972), p. 7.

22 Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1982), p. 45.

techniques, in general there is little departure from the existing principles of optical composition, nor from anything of what is now termed 'poor-man's process'.[23] *Band of Brothers*, like *Gladiator* and *Road to Perdition*, used these established production techniques to simulate action, movement, time and space. They include the extensive use of bluescreen and greenscreen, models and motion control, slow motion, and the old standby of studio-hands rocking vehicles to simulate travel. Whilst the new techniques offered by CGI, such as the 'tiling' of crowds, parachutists and aeroplanes, do alleviate the problem of handling extras or building large sets, any significant advantage of using CGI on screen has mostly been in 'accelerating' existing techniques.[24]

The fact that these techniques have become easier suggests that changes have been conceptual rather than fundamental, and colour-timing is a case in point. A ubiquitous effect employed in *Band of Brothers*, the digital 'colour-timing' of images was used to create its bleached, washed out or desaturated appearance. Chemically, colour-timing refers to the process of developing film to ensure correct colour balance. Recent advances made by Kodak's Cinesite lab had created a more flexible tool that allowed this treatment to the image to be done selectively within each image. Using this, every shot in every episode of *Band of Brothers* was digitally manipulated for colour, with generally the most intensive process being the tracking of skin tones to preserve them whilst colour washing the rest of the image.[25] These washes tended to 'bend' certain colours, such as green, towards specific shades of ochre or olive from which the foreground characters, often wearing green, could be isolated.[26] Alternatively, other colours (the red

23 Ray Zone, 'A master of mood', *American Cinematographer* (August 2002). URL: http://www.theasc.com/magazine/aug02/perdition/sidebar1.html [13 July 2004]. See also Oppenheimer, 'Close combat', p. 44.

24 The practice of tiling involves the capture of one element in the principal photography and the subsequent repetition of that element elsewhere on the screen in digital post-production. In *Band of Brothers*, a column of thousands of German POWs, plus accompanying guards and Army vehicles, was 'tiled' from a much smaller group. Similar effects were used to create whole formations of aeroplanes and parachutists from one or two models filmed for the series' two invasion sequences – D-Day and Market Garden.

25 Jean Oppenheimer, 'Virtual coloring', *American Cinematographer* (September 2001), p. 39.

26 Luke Rainey describes this process in ibid., p. 39.

***Band of Brothers* (HBO/BBC/Playtone, 2001) DreamWorks SKG. © Home Box Office.**

of a smoke grenade, the orange bunting in Eindhoven) could be made to 'pop' for dramatic effect within an overall contrasting palette.[27] As visual effects supervisor Angus Bickerton described, the desired effect was one that 'suggests period and also makes [the image] punchy and visceral'.[28]

Such an *invisible* effect brings us back to Plato's challenge to artistic imitation, and Flusser's similar warning. Plato's attack on art is close to our own understanding of the pitfalls of accepting visual *realism*, such as those established by MacCabe in 1974. The danger of mimesis, as seen by Plato and then MacCabe, is in the carelessness with which audiences view artistic imitation as innocent or self-existing. Flusser's contribution to this argument is to focus on the role that photography plays in this self-deception – not as an optical or chemical process that convinces us of its objectivity, but as a cultural process that convinces us of our autonomy.[29]

For Flusser, all photographs are technical images and are thus images of abstract concepts, the conversion of light into information – encoded by this cultural condition. The origins of colour-timing in chemical photography, for example, exist in the effort made to give film colours more or less brilliance, more or less lustre, more or less 'honesty' as required. Colour photography hides this abstraction within its truthful correspondence to colours seen in the real world. Colour balance, and therefore the act of colour-timing, is a cultural encoding hidden by the correspondence with nature: 'The 'more genuine' the colours of the photograph become, the more untruthful they are, the more they conceal their theoretical origin.[30]

The cultural encoding of photography is therefore hidden within its abstraction, a process that appears empirical, and it is difficult to see immediately how digitization has actually changed this. However, what initially appears as a labour-saving device becomes something that allows a conceptual leap: the ability to choose which colours to establish as genuine, and which to establish as 'more genuine' within each frame. Chemical colour-timing affects the whole of the frame indiscriminately, appearing to be the effect of film stock and emphasizing the camera's motivated presence within the action. The discriminating, or 'choosy', flexibility of digital colour-timing allows for this general impression of documentary film footage whilst also maintaining or enhancing certain elements of colour for dramatic effect.

To return to the initial problem, anyone familiar with industry hype will know of the claims made for historical films, and the issues riding on them. Perhaps this explains the all too vague statements of intent in the magazine interviews with producers and directors, who wish to emphasize both the subjective experience of combat and the accuracy of its empirical mimesis. This is the 'Platonic test'.

Upon the realization of the impossible task of absolute mimesis – holding a mirror to the world – production intentions can quickly

27 *'Band of Brothers*: an epic for the small screen', Kodak in-house webzine.

28 Wilson, 'Action man', p. 68.

29 Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, pp. 35–44.

30 Ibid., p. 44.

become the site of confusion or hype. On the other hand, since the production is judged on both adequacy to the real and its use of reality, a production's performance becomes a matter of *how* it uses reality. However, it is possible that this vacillation, or hesitation, is just an example of a production team's crisis of confidence. For Plato, any defence of art as worthy of society should be ethically made. This could be on the grounds of art as education, for example, but this is something with which entertainment and spectacle seem at odds. Flusser, on the other hand, provides a critical solution to the problem, one that begins from the moment of our realization that freedom from the 'black box' – the cultural machine of photography – is impossible. Instead, 'Freedom is playing against the camera'.[31] Akin to what Gilles Deleuze would have called cinema's 'powers of the false', this idea suggests that it is cinema's artifice that gives it the capacity to say something ethical, moral or philosophical, since artifice automatically draws with it the central issues of truth and fiction: 'The break is not between fiction and reality, but in the new mode of story that affects both of them'.[32] Since absolute mimesis is unattainable and maybe even untenable, perhaps projects with an earnest intent, such as *Band of Brothers*, should be judged not on how they 'fully adequate the real', as MacCabe describes it, but on how they manage their inadequacy to it.

31 Ibid., p. 81. See also Pavel Büchler, 'The blind train-spotter: a delirium of doubt', in David Green (ed.), *Where is the Photograph?* (Manchester: Photoforum/Photoworks/ Cornerhouse, 2003), p. 90.

32 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* (1985), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone, 1994), p. 150.

The trauma debate: Just looking? Traumatic affect, film form and spectatorship in the work of Lars von Trier

CAROLINE BAINBRIDGE

Discourses of film and cultural studies on cinematic pleasure traditionally draw our attention to notions of sensory pleasure and spectatorial subjectivities as constructed in and through the narrative text, its uses and gratifications, and the institution or apparatus. Arguably, this has entailed a rejection of the value of psychological perspectives on subjectivities in culture, a rejection which is in the process of being reconsidered in the context of the emerging turn towards theories of trauma in relation to cinema. In my view, holding on to the psychological in order adequately to comprehend the formation of spectatorship is essential, as unconscious processes are central to the experience of affect and are consequently pivotal in any effort to theorize the experience of pleasure.[1] Consideration of the psychological in relation to those modes of cinema which apparently *fail* to fit paradigms of pleasure is crucial, and it is here that the turn to discourses of trauma is useful in understanding structures of spectatorship.

Such modes of cinema thwart the desire for pleasure in the text and yet simultaneously heighten our desire for it through their very insistence on the act of undoing our relation to cinema as we have been schooled to read it. What is it about cinema that enables us to experience 'unpleasure' while remaining paradoxically rooted to the spot, enthralled by fictional narrative images? How is this paradoxical

1 Here, the notion of the unconscious draws on Freud's formulation of the ego and the id, in which he suggests that the ego 'starts out from the system *Pcpt* [the perceptual system], which is its nucleus, and begins by embracing the *Pcs* [the preconscious], which is adjacent to the mnemic residues. But, as we have learnt, the ego is also unconscious. . . . I propose to [call] the entity which starts out from the system *Pcpt* and begins by being *Pcs* the "ego", and [to follow] Groddeck in calling the other part of the mind, into which this entity extends and which behaves as though it were *Ucs* [unconscious], the "id".' Sigmund Freud, 'The ego and the id' (1923), in *On Metapsychology, Penguin Freud Library Volume 11* (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 361–2. Notions of the preconscious are thus incorporated into the unconscious motivations of the ego and are therefore not addressed directly

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in the context of this essay, although there are interesting perspectives on affect which are arguably facilitated by a turn to the notion of the preconscious. See Freud, 'The unconscious' (1915), in *On Metapsychology*, pp. 179–82.

pleasure to be theorized? The question of affect is central to efforts to comprehend the dynamics of such a mode of spectatorship, and the ethical dimension of the relation between spectator and screen/text arguably underpins the potential for forging such an understanding. The fascination of films that challenge our pleasures in looking taps into questions around the ethics of looking when we know we should not do so, and is thus connected to unconscious motivations related to the polymorphous perversity of desire. Yet, such an explanation does not go far enough. The potential of such cinema to shake up the viewing spectator and to cause an embodied affective response that prompts self-reflexivity about the pleasures of illicit looking requires a psychologically inflected revision of the pleasures of spectatorship in terms that allow the spectator to participate in the making of meaning. This essay sets out to think through the implications of these questions around trauma, film form, ethics and affect by focusing on Lars von Trier's *Idioterne/The Idiots* (1998), the second film of his 'gold heart' trilogy of films, which also includes *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000).

The 'gold heart' trilogy is a useful case in point, as each of the films leaves the spectator feeling unsettled and exposed to unpleasurable affect. The trilogy concerns itself with notions of goodness, raising ethical concerns around the experience of otherness, and foregrounds the experience of trauma at both the narrative thematic and formal levels. In *Breaking the Waves*, for example, we witness the unbearable propensity for self-sacrifice on the part of the protagonist, Bess (Emily Watson), who forces herself into prostitution in a desperate attempt to persuade God to save and cure her husband, Jan (Stellan Skarsgard), who has been paralyzed in an oil rig accident. Bess's sacrifice culminates in her violent and fatal rape, and her suffering and death are made all the more unbearable for the spectator because Jan does, indeed, recover and survive once Bess has died. In *Dancer in the Dark*, Selma (Björk) struggles to acquire enough money to save her son, Gene (Vladica Kostic) from the hereditary eye disorder that has blighted her life. Her struggle culminates in an unwitting crime of murder, for which she is publicly hanged.

The question of ethics is especially visible in the second film of the trilogy, von Trier's Dogme '95 film *The Idiots*, in which the visceral and highly affective narrative content is foregrounded by a self-conscious play with film form. The narrative centres on a group of middle-class young people who take it upon themselves to express their 'inner idiot' by 'spassing' in public. Led by Stoffer (Jens Albinus), the group indulges in a number of 'spassing' scenarios which take place in the local swimming pool and park as well as at a restaurant and a cafe and during a visit to a local factory. Karen (Bodil Jorgensen), whom we eventually come to recognize as the film's protagonist, encounters the group at a restaurant and is drawn into their way of life with no clear motivation. The film is structured around these interludes which are

broken up by a number of to-camera, one-to-one interviews which appear to have taken place at a later date and which lend the fictional narrative an air of documentary 'reality'. This sets up an interesting relation to the documentary aesthetic, as the film is shot with hand-held cameras and the use of the 'talking head' interview segments encourages us to view these scenes of fiction as if they were indexical of reality.

This play with film form is crucial to von Trier's filmic treatment of trauma and the foregrounding of affect in the formation of the spectator positions made available to us. I will argue that the affect itself becomes traumatic in quality, demanding an embodied emotional response from the spectator, who struggles to cope with the impact of the trauma at the level of representation because the strategies employed by von Trier set aside the familiar tropes of film language and film form. The manipulation of film form, then, impacts on the unconscious processes of the spectator, forcing a shift in the spectator's awareness of the ways in which meaning is dually constructed through the text and through the act of spectatorship, and it does so by creating affect. In this trilogy, the construction of affect is most clearly seen in the closing sequences of the films when the spectator is left overwrought and without closure from the filmic ending. In *Breaking the Waves*, the spectator is spared the bleakest of endings in the film's prologue depicting Bess's funeral when von Trier resorts to an extraordinary fantasy sequence in which bells are rung in heaven for Bess's soul and goodness. By contrast, in *Dancer in the Dark* the ending is intensely brutal, as the public hanging of Selma culminates in our view of her dangling body being closed off from prying eyes by the drawing of curtains, whilst the camera cranes up the scene, allowing us momentarily to glimpse the grief of those with whom Selma has engaged in the course of the narrative. The film ends with a lyric from Selma's dying song superimposed on the final scenes and a crane shot to a densely black screen encompassed in silence.[2] In *The Idiots*, the mystery of Karen's commitment to this middle-class group is only revealed at the end of the film, when Karen chooses to return to her family home in order to 'spass' in the presence of people who matter to her (a challenge which other characters have failed to achieve). At this point, we learn that Karen has run away from home as a result of the death of her child and an inability on her part to attend his funeral. We hear that her family has presumed her dead. In this context, we watch as Karen dribbles food in the act of 'spassing' until she incurs a slap from her husband, Anders (Hans Henrik Clemensen), and is encouraged to leave by her friend and fellow 'idiot' Susanne (Anne Louise Hassing). The role of this traumatic affect and von Trier's excessive dependence on it contributes to, and disrupts, the potential for pleasure in watching the films. It is as though our relation to the psychological dimension of traumatic affect reinscribes us as spectator-

2 As José Arroyo has suggested, this is, indeed, the best way to upset an audience. See José Arroyo, 'How do you solve a problem like Von Trier?', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 10, no. 9 (2000), p. 15.

subjects in ways that invite a revision of the narrative in order to comprehend its meaning and rescue ourselves as subjects.

We rely on the unconscious processes of trauma to make this possible. In the psychoanalytic account, trauma is presented in two stages. It is possible to distinguish between the first moment of trauma, the moment in which the trauma occurs and is repressed, and the second moment, in which the memory of the experience of trauma is triggered and prompts an overwhelming sense of psychical struggle and pain in an effort to master the effects of the trauma and to regain a sense of balance and wholeness. I shall argue that, in its manipulation of traumatic affect in the spectator, von Trier's work raises important questions about what is at stake when cinema elicits unpleasure and about the psychological processes at play when this occurs.

Von Trier's work has garnered much critical acclaim *and* disdain, as well as popular appeal, with many commentators highlighting the sadism implicit in his filmmaking.[3] There are two key elements of his work pertinent to this discussion: first, his films seek to trouble our sense of pleasure in cinema by drawing on narrative fictions that abound with moments of trauma; second, his work situates the spectator in ways that actively disrupt traditional film-theoretical accounts of cinematic subjectivity by laying a particular emphasis on filmic strategies that confound our familiarity with fictional forms in cinema. In its structure and strategy, *The Idiots* largely conforms to the rules set out in the Dogme '95 manifesto,[4] yet there is a key motif that seems to inflect this particular Dogme film with a confounding sense of strangeness, namely its insistence on making use of a documentary aesthetic in the context of a fiction film.

In choosing to incorporate a hand-held camera, fly-on-the-wall aesthetic and to-camera interview segments into the narrative, von Trier calls upon our familiarity with the documentary format in order to heighten his claim to the real in this fiction. The interview segments of the narrative serve a dual function. Shot three weeks after the main six-week shoot,[5] they serve primarily to offer moments of reflexivity on the narrative. However, they also serve a narrative function in that they help to direct our patterns of identification with the fictional characters by anticipating the unfolding of narrative events and foregrounding events that we, as spectators, have not yet witnessed, flagging them as central to how the narrative should be read and understood. The interview clips, then, in a sense tailor our response to the story, but do so by masquerading as a form of truth-telling. They work in tandem with the camera throughout the film, echoing the intrusive quality of the camera's engagement with the actors. The camera is implicated in the action. Its role is intrusive, but inflected as testimonial. It is not overtly marked as authorial, as it creates a sense that the action is unfolding before it as if it were 'live'. The cinematic 'mistakes' of catching the crew on film add to this feeling.

3 See, for example, Richard Corliss, 'Dark victory', *Time Europe*, vol. 155, no. 22 (2000). URL: http://www.time.com/time/europe/magazine/2000/0605/cannes.html; Robert Davis, 'Let us now scowl at those who beat waifs', *Errata*, 20 June 2003. URL: http://www.erratamag.com/archives/2003/06/dogville.html; and Damon Wise, 'No Dane, no gain', *The Observer Magazine*, 12 October 2003. URL: http://observer.guardian.co.uk/magazine/story/0,11913,1061058,00.html.

4 The Dogme '95 manifesto consists of a 'vow of chastity'. By signing up to this vow, directors agree to adhere to a set of rules designed to delimit the technological interventions permissible in the shooting of a film and its manipulation in post-production. The full manifesto is available online at URL: http://www.dogme95.dk/menu/menuset.htm and has been published in Jack Stevenson, *Lars von Trier* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

5 Peter Ovig Knudsen, 'The man who would give up control' interview. URL: http://www.dogme95.dk/menu/menuset.htm [9 June 2003].

The camera, then, mediates the action. It is not the site of enunciation, as we might expect. Instead, it directly addresses us as spectators, inviting us to participate in the unfolding of the narrative and thus to participate in the making of its meaning. In what follows, I shall argue that this mode of cinematic address heightens the intensity of our relation to the film and its protagonists. This is wrought through the filmic manipulation of form and generic convention. Paradoxically, however, we are nevertheless unconsciously encouraged to maintain a relation to the narrative as fiction through the context of the interview clips. The film form, then, is important in facilitating and establishing the framework of the spectator's response to the narrative. This has important consequences for the construction of affect in the closing sequence of the film.

Recent debates in documentary theory foreground the ever closer relation of documentary to fiction, of documentary actuality and its creative treatment to discourses of authorship and interpretation.[6] In one sense, all images are fictions of the real. *The Idiots* deploys a range of documentary techniques that might be aligned with Corner's 'evidential mode' or with Nichols's 'observational mode' at the level of the image.[7] It also draws on documentary strategy in its use of sound. Here, then, we have a wealth of documentary strategies deployed for the purposes of a fiction, yet this film is not an example of 'mockumentary' in the style of *This Is Spinal Tap* (Rob Reiner, 1984), for example. It is definitively *not* a fabricated documentary. Instead, this is fiction in the guise of Nichols's performative mode of documentary.[8] It is about creating affect and disrupting patterns of looking and pleasure in cinema in order to construct an active spectator. We cannot get away with passive, voyeuristic looking in this film. Instead, we are required actively to respond in order to salvage meaning in the film. We are required to engage with the fictional material masquerading as truth in order to act as knowing spectators. In so doing, we acknowledge awareness of the mode of address von Trier is attempting to create through this play with film form. The use of a documentary aesthetic sustains the sense of a direct address to the spectator throughout the body of the film. What is more, the narrative substance of the film centres on the ethically questionable antics of a group of middle-class young people 'spassing' in a variety of public and private settings. The use of the documentary aesthetic, then, encourages the spectator to pass judgement on the narrative as if it were real, and yet, as spectators, we know that the film is not a *real* documentary, and so our judgement does not have to be real either. The play of form and content here is crucial to our relation to the film as a whole.

Superficially, then, von Trier's style seems ethically rather suspect. There is an extensive and concerted effort to create generic confusions that results in an overarching sense that this is a director who sets out to manipulate and abuse the spectatorial position and role. In a sense,

6 See Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: a Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000); John Corner, *The Art of Record: a Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: the Documentary Film Revisited* (London: British Film Institute, 1995).

7 Corner, *The Art of Record*, p. 28; Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 33.

8 Ibid., p. 34.

von Trier's strategy seems archly postmodern. Yet, I would argue that the question of cinematic address is central to an understanding of what is at stake in von Trier's work. In each of the films that make up the 'gold heart' trilogy, the traumatic function is foregrounded at the level of the narrative in the context of an exploration of goodness so that ethical concerns are centralized in the narrative. The ethical status of the films, however, also depends on the filmic form. Furthermore, the ethical relation of the spectator to the text is also of great interest in the context of this work, as, through its self-reflexivity, it points to the ways in which film form and narrative content make spectator positions available. It also offers valuable insights into the structure of the (un) pleasure that arises in the context of traumatic affect.

The recent turn to ethics in continental philosophy foregrounds the interrelation between subjectivity and alterity, arguing that openness to alterity is the basis of becoming an ethical subject. In her specific engagement with ethics, Luce Irigaray has suggested that in order to become ethical subjects it is essential to manufacture a relation to the other that is premissed on a directness of address to the other. For Irigaray, this creates an ethics in which the radical alterity of the other is foregrounded and respected, and this in turn promotes a situation in which the subject is able to become in such a way that the role of alterity in formulating desiring subjectivity is acknowledged.[9] Subjectivity, in this account, is in process, or in flux, and is able to reshape itself according to the experience of openness to the other. In some ways, this notion of subjectivity in flux is what is at stake in the spectatorial relation to the kind of cinematic affect proffered in the work on von Trier. As we have seen, his play with film form bewilders the spectator, albeit momentarily. The subject-positions made available to the spectator are tantalizingly snatched away at the precise moment when traumatic affect is brought into play. Arguably, then, this misuse of the familiar structure of film-viewing has parallels with the ethical moment in the work of Irigaray, as it offers a directness of address to us as subjects that opens up a space in which we are encouraged to consider the place of the other in order to reconcile ourselves to our own experience; and this is made apparent in von Trier's construction of the cinematic address in his work.

In *The Idiots*, one could argue that the interview segments position the spectator as witness to the effects of an experiment, in which the place of the other looms large. The narrative concern with both the experience of alterity and its effects is foregrounded by von Trier in his use of the interview segment technique, and this prompts the spectator to reflect on her/his own relation to the other as represented in the film's narrative, as if she/he were implicated. The consequent structures of identification depend on an elaborate masquerade of truth-telling that is designed to evoke an emotional engagement and response in the spectator, one premissed in affect. The cinema here becomes a site of exchange, then, a site of ethical discourse designed to stir up spectators

9 See Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993).

into an active mode of viewing that is fresh and challenging in the context of fiction film. The role of the camera as mediator to the spectator as witness is crucial here, in that it renders discernible the very space of such an exchange. It is, in other words, the camera that preserves us in an ethical relation to the fiction while dissimulating a mode of truth-telling designed to disarm more familiar modalities of viewing.

However, in the closing sequence of the film, the direct address to the spectator is compromised, and it is wilfully disrupted in order to produce differently nuanced affect in the spectator. It thus requires the spectator's active engagement in the formation of meaning at the end of the film. In the film's closing sequence, the camera, which has hitherto functioned as a mediator of the action, suddenly abandons this documentary aesthetic in favour of a much more familiar fictive mode, in which the camera anticipates the action. The camera takes on the guise of Anders, Karen's husband, as he strikes her. At this point, the apparent independence of the camera from the action we have thus far witnessed is exposed as a fiction. Here, then, the camera reveals itself as a channel for a pre-scripted fiction, anticipating and moving with Anders as he strikes Karen. For the spectator, the psychological violence of this moment is not rooted merely in the violence of the narrative. The effect of this sudden shift from documentary masquerade into a fictive mode wrenches us from the perceived security of the address to us up to this point. The affect of the moment is profound and traumatic. We are rudely awoken to the fictional status of the film because the mode of cinematic address has so radically altered. Despite this, we have experienced a directness of address throughout the film up until this point, and the reversion to a fictive mode of filmmaking closes down our identification with the characters/camera in ways that are difficult for us to bear. The traumatic affect of the moment comes, then, not just in response to the diegetic violence but also in response to the psychological violence imposed on us via the filmic form.

This shift reminds us that we are watching when we seemingly should not, and we are encouraged unconsciously to recall the fantasies of the primal scene, to resist the urgent desire to announce our presence, and are forced into the uncomfortable position of voyeur. Ethically, *The Idiots* is not true to itself. Crucially, it appears to elude the morality of looking, encouraging us unconsciously to adopt the position of onlooker to fantasy, in order to maintain a relation to the fictional status of the film, whilst simultaneously constructing itself as 'truth' through its exploitation of documentary style and strategy. It is only at the end when this slippage is made apparent to us that we find ourselves in the unbearable position of being offered no respite in the narrative closure from the fact of our voyeurism and the affect of the narrative trauma, a trauma which has been revealed to us at the very moment when the film form reverts to the fictional mode. As spectators, then, we are unexpectedly drawn into the narrative trauma,

as the camera ceases to act as mediator and begins to enunciate instead. The narrative trauma, then, evokes traumatic affect in the spectator at the precise moment when our trust in the cinematic mode of address is broken. In effect, the shift in address through film form augments the extent of the traumatic affect for the spectator, which comes in the closing moments of the film, leaving the spectator with little scope for recuperation.

My argument here is that the spectator has to seek recourse to her own unconscious capacity for the navigation of the traumatic moment in order to articulate the affect. In a sense, the spectator is trapped into the second moment of trauma and yet she/he has no means of working it through as the film has come to an end. The film, then, offers no compromise for the spectator. Pleasure and resolution are not made readily available but rather have to be discerned as a result of a kind of working through. We can draw on the corresponding emphases placed on the process of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action), in both the psychoanalytic account of the primal scene and in trauma theory's elucidation of trauma and subjectivity, to argue that at the end of this film, the spectator subject needs to seek out a mechanism for discerning textual pleasure if she/he is to be fulfilled by the experience of the film. To put this in slightly different terms, it is as if, at the end of the film, our relationship to the cinema and to cinematic form has been undone by the texts so that we need to find a way of reconstituting ourselves in relation to and through the text. In order to experience pleasure in von Trier's work, we need to negotiate our relation to it by revisiting the narrative and its textual form. A return to the text is a necessary strategy for the spectator in order to appease the displeasure thrust upon her at the film's end.

The Idiots places unreasonable demands on us as spectators, offering shocking moments of cinematic representation and rupture, leaving us to cope without any means of escape from the trauma of the denouements embedded in the narrative of the film. As Freud suggests, in the economic perspective, trauma can be understood as 'in a short period of time, present[ing] the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way'.[10] In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he suggests that 'the living vesicle' is usually protected by a shield. In trauma, as Laplanche and Pontalis suggest, this barrier is breached and the task of the psyche is to utilize all available resources in an attempt to lessen the quantities of energy that are flowing and to enable us to return to a psychic state of balance in which the pleasure principle might once again function.[11] In the context of the type of cinematic traumatic affect described above, it is clear that the traditional relation to cinematic notions of pleasure is similarly disrupted. At the end of *The Idiots*, we might be seen to have an excess of powerful stimulus that breaches our psychic defences and marks us as bearers of affect in relation to that which we have

10 Sigmund Freud, 'Introductory lectures on psychoanalysis', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XVI*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1916), p. 275.

11 Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. David Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p. 466.

witnessed. We are plunged into an ethical relation with the events on screen in ways that force us to renegotiate our relation to the real.

The complexity of the interweaving of notions of truth and fiction is cleverly nuanced in the strategies employed by von Trier and in his unwillingness to let us off the hook without paying for our psychological urge to look. The traumatic affect is the payoff, and our own capacity to tolerate trauma is called into play in order to provide us with a means of finding pleasure in the film. There are parallels here with the second moment of trauma in the psychoanalytic account, the moment in which 'the randomness of an event triggers memories of an earlier one which might never have come to consciousness had the later event not occurred'.[12] The ending of von Trier's film forces us to defer the affect of the action, allowing us to try to distinguish between having to recollect and reconstruct these fantasized events in relation to the real of our lived experience. We are called upon to enunciate our relation to the image, to speak an ethical perspective on our cinematic experience. Just as psychoanalytic discourses argue that the *Nachträglich* recollection of the primal scene enables us to experience the gaps in our senses of subjectivity, the moment of traumatic affect in cinematic closure might be seen to open up a new space in which to consider spectatorial subjectivity, allowing us to (re-)view with a critical eye and a sense of subjectivity that is effectively addressed and deconstructed, ruptured and reconstituted, through the practice of viewing. In abandoning the spectator at the very moment that the traumatic affect is evoked, such films seem to play with notions of sadism and masochism in the psychological processes of pleasure in spectatorship. It is this ethical dimension of a reconfiguration of spectatorship that marks out von Trier's work in relation to trauma theory.

Thus, where von Trier initially appears to be ethically rather suspect in his masquerade of genre conventions, style and strategy, in that he might appear to be colonizing the space of the other, we might argue that in fact his work is ethically consummate and admirable in its insistence on obviating the authorial role in favour of creating a model of filmmaking in which the place of enunciation is always in process or flux, and in which the spectator is directly addressed. This promotes a mode of cinematic exchange that functions somewhat like a feedback loop or a sounding board. The generic play produces a discourse of reciprocity between the spectator, the text and the machinery of cinema, and offers an ethical perspective on the issue of the spectator-subject of contemporary film. In creating an ethical relation to film, this work reveals the extent of our psychological investment in cinematic pleasure as it demonstrates the extent to which the spectator needs to make recourse to psychical mechanisms in order to navigate films that challenge and rupture. The capacity of cinema to open up potential spaces for subjectivities grounded in non-fixity and in relation to the experience of alterity is convincingly deployed in such contexts,

12 Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 35.

pointing to the usefulness of an Irigarayan approach to the role of difference in the formation of cinematic notions of spectatorial subjectivity. The role of affect is crucial here, highlighting the way in which the mechanisms deployed in the experience of unpleasurable trauma can be put to use in the context of unpleasurable cinema to provide a pleasurable sense of mastery and self-awareness. It can be argued that this is the appeal of moments of unpleasure in cinema.

I would like to thank the anonymous reader at *Screen* and Heather Nunn for their helpful comments on this essay.

Inside/out: private trauma and public knowledge in true crime documentary

ANITA BIRESSI

Witnessing is also the discursive act of stating one's experience for the benefit of an audience that was not present at the event and yet must make some kind of judgement about it.[1]

Thomas Elsaesser suggests that 'therapeutic television' in the form of the talk show (to which might be added video diaries, lifestyle shows and reality TV formats) has 'shaped an entire culture of confession and witnessing, of exposure and self-exposure'.[2] Certainly the media, and especially television, have played a notable and controversial role in integrating and assimilating 'trauma' as a mode of experience into the broader psychic economy. Entertainment television's enthusiastic adoption of therapeutic discourses of revelation, truth-telling and self-exposure, and of popular notions of 'trauma' as the kernel of these revelations, has seeped into even the most privileged and 'reputable' of forms, including news, current affairs and documentary. Television documentaries increasingly represent personal concerns within the public sphere through a lexicon of the melodramatic and the emotional, with experience, personal testimony, recollection or witness as the touchstones of truth, evidence or, at the very least, authenticity. In their drive to represent and explore personal trauma and sometimes shocking psychological damage, they adopt modes of interrogation and an aesthetics of representation that attempt to span the divide between presence and absence, history and memory, the fact of trauma and the problem of its lack of fixed origins. This article examines *Our Father*

1 John Durham Peters, 'Witnessing', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 23, no. 6 (2001), p. 709.

2 Thomas Elsaesser 'Postmodernism as mourning work', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2001), p. 196.

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the Serial Killer (Court TV/Everyman, 2002) as one example of a growing number of 'true crime' documentaries that focus on the 'fallout' of crime, attending to its victims, bystanders or witnesses as the victims not simply of crime but of the traumatic event in the heart of the community.[3] It examines how the programme takes on board therapeutic discourses, how it seeks to accommodate the divisions listed above, and how it reconciles the imperative to tell the truth of the film subjects' experience with the imperative to make a satisfying documentary film.

In *Our Father the Serial Killer* journalist John Edginton investigates claims made by Steve and Dianne Griggs that their father, Steven Griggs senior, committed numerous acts of atrocity during their childhood and beyond. They accuse their father of being a long-term serial killer of children and of some adults. These memories return to Steve Griggs as an adult, and when he turns to his younger sister Dianne she corroborates his recollections. They report their father to the police, who take their accusations seriously. But they are concerned that all the investigations are going to come to nothing. Having seen a documentary on criminal justice by Edginton they invite him to tell their story. He meets with them and, like the police, finds them highly plausible. The documentary trails the pair as they investigate and challenge their father. The film is an account of intimate injury and also, in keeping with this style of personalized documentary, a process of accusation: of naming the abuser as part of publicly reclaiming the self. In this case, the documentary presents the pathology of its subjects (the harm they suffered and the case history of that harm) in a form that lurches between horrific, damaging or intense recollected events and representational strategies that elide such intimate confession with broader popular cultural myths of trauma – the bogeyman in the woods, the killer under the stairs, the mobile serial killer.

The Griggs are relentless investigators of their father. They unearth old newspaper evidence of children missing at the precise time and location of their father's alleged murders; they offer highly detailed and convincing accounts of children that they saw murdered, of scenes of crime and the disposal of bodies. The difficulty for the police is that while they are unable to find evidence in support of the Griggs's accusations, neither are they able to disprove them. Much of the mythology of the serial killer 'profile' seems to fit their parent: he was in the army and was trained to commit violence. Furthermore, he was very dominant in the home which was situated in an isolated location, he dug out a huge cellar, he was mobile and had opportunities to kill. In addition, as the police noted, there are missing people whose disappearances remain to be accounted for in the surrounding area. Also, after the death of his wife the rest of his children quickly moved away and failed to keep in touch. Only Steve and Dianne remained in the vicinity, seemingly not out of affection but to stalk their parent and safeguard the community from his predatory habits.

3 The phrase 'true crime' is usually used quite broadly to include any true accounts or case studies of real crime and its aftermath. It often refers to documentaries using an investigative mode either to 'solve' or to recall the details of notorious murders or other atrocities. In this context, however, I am referring to a far smaller band of films and programmes that explore the aftermath or 'fallout' of the crime and its status as traumatic event. The latter type would include films by Errol Morris such as *The Killer Inside Me* (2000) and *Joan Dougherty, Crime Scene Cleaner* (2000), Nick Broomfield's *Aileen: the Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003) and, most recently, Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans* (2004). For a fuller account of Errol Morris's filmmaking practices and how they relate to the exploration of trauma see Heather Nunn's essay in this volume. *Our Father the Serial Killer* was first broadcast on the Court TV channel in the US and on BBC2 in the UK, both in 2002.

Edginton's classic investigatory documentary technique reveals these facts, using interviews, documentary evidence and photographic stills. Its narrative structure is one of continuing investigation with small revelations along the way. The audience follows both Edginton and the Griggs siblings from those intense first moments when their horrific accusations are voiced, through their increasingly frustrated attempts to produce the evidence, to a growing realization that whatever terrible crimes were committed by the father they were unlikely to include relentless and continuing murder. This more conventional process of documentary representation is intercut with the subjective perspective licensed by confessional programming formats in which the siblings, often highly distressed, recall to camera the horrific scenes which they either witnessed or in which they were forced to participate. They are shown recalling these events and making accusations to the documentarist, the police and medical experts. Edginton revisits the scenes of crime as remembered by the siblings; remaining firmly off camera but present through controlling questions and a voiceover that is increasingly sceptical of the factual status of the Griggs's surfacing memories. Towards the end of the film they meet with a psychologist who confirms that they have undergone serious traumatic experiences but doubts their recollections of serial killing. It emerges, as Steve's stories become increasingly unlikely, hyperbolic and contradictory, that their memories are connected to their own experience of severe abuse as children. Other siblings confirm that Steve, and to a lesser extent Dianne, were shockingly and consistently abused. One sister even says that Griggs senior was so dominating and violent that she would not be surprised if their father was, in fact, a killer. It is through these personal disclosures, inconsistencies of evidence and moments of intense confessional revelation that the alternative crime story unfolds; not of serial killing but of child abuse. The initial investigation of a public and community-based crime becomes an investigation of psychic states in the aftermath of some terrible private and hidden traumatic event or series of events.

What is certain by the conclusion of the film is that the Griggs offspring have suffered classic psychic trauma. They underwent events defined by their intensity, their own incapacity to respond to them and by the long-lasting upheaval that this brings to their psychical organization. They were unable fully to master or to work through the excess of traumatic experience successfully.[4] If trauma can be understood as the compulsive return to the scene of a crime, then their (mis)remembering of abuse (which dominates Steve's life to a debilitating degree) through the metaphor of serial killing constitutes an apposite kind of working through; and also, in effect, a shared screen memory.[5] For the conceptualization of Griggs senior as 'serial killer' is nothing if not a figure or trope of endless repetition: his crimes, according to his children's stories, are innumerable, and unending, elaborate variations on a theme. And it is this trope of serial killing,

4 Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1988), p. 465.

5 An assertion made by Mark Seltzer in his *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 260–1.

with all its attendant mythology already established through film, drama, novels and reportage, that speaks to the viewer of something greater than individual trauma and which forms the connection between private suffering and the public narration of that experience. The serial killer, then, is a familiar and powerful cultural trope used by both Edginton and the Griggs in different but related ways to re-present the ultimately unrepresentable events of an abusive family past. Whilst the Griggs siblings clearly underwent extremely violent experiences as children, their trauma *as trauma* lacks *clear* incontestable origins that can be unearthed. The documentary does credit to this, perhaps inadvertently, by revealing the disjunctive relation between journalistic practice (embodied by Edginton), with its clear narrative structure, chronological time, factual reference and public service address, and the Griggs's memories, which are marked by absences, gaps in chronology, fragments, flashbacks and repetition.

Rather than trying to understand the trauma of what are, after all, from the viewer's perspective, highly mediated subjects of documentary practice, *Our Father the Serial Killer* should be read for its use of contradictory discourses of private distress and public crime story, personal memory and public history, and the precarious manner in which these are yoked together. For example, in one scene Steve finds a newspaper clipping of an old unsolved child murder and 'recalls' that his father was the perpetrator of the crime. We follow Steve and his sister, together with police officers, to the scene of the crime near a river embankment where Steve describes in convincing detail how their father killed and disposed of the child. Eventually, the police realize that Steve is unable to recall any details that could be corroborated with the information they held back from the press. This is one of many inconclusive scenarios in which public facts and fears about crime in the community seem to connect with private recollections only to trail off as loose ends. By allowing Steve to declare publicly, and on film, his recollection of these dreadful acts, the documentary taps into the narrativizing of private events popularized in confessional forms such as chat shows and video diaries. But it does so in a way that ultimately objectifies the film's subjects rather than empowering them. For Steve's and Dianne's crises, in which they bear witness to various atrocities, are increasingly undercut by the lack of evidence and the growing scepticism of law enforcers and medical experts, and they become spectacles of declining credibility.

In the riverside scene, among others, Steve concentrates, gazing into the distance as he focuses on his recollections, rather like a medium in a seance. As he gazes beyond the camera into the middle distance, the camera's point of view locates him as overly intense, excessive and unsound. Edginton's authorial voice, present through commentary and editing, which guides the viewer into a more 'correct' understanding of the Griggs's predicament, shifts the emphasis much more firmly onto the documentarist's encounter with, and investigative search for, the

'truth' of his story. The siblings' story of the search for evidence of the truth of their father's criminality ultimately becomes subordinated to Edginton's story of the search for the truth of their trauma. Edginton's story is captured in a form, documentary, which is far more highly regarded than true crime or talk show confession but which shares with such popular programming an attempt to construct a topography of unrepresentable elements such as interior states: memory, trauma and fear. And also, just as importantly for a public form, it reveals the ways in which trauma documentaries across the spectrum from the 'serious' to the 'popular' attempt to represent individual and also collective fantasies: mythological structures that explain culture to itself, structures which viewing subjects will recognize and with which they will connect. In other words, it renders private trauma knowable via public narratives.

One might ask what kinds of documentary forms are most effective at delivering these seemingly unrepresentable interior landscapes through broader mythic structures? We are talking for the most part about documentaries that are internally rich in representational strategies such as condensation, displacement, symbolism of all kinds. John Corner calls these 'thick text' documentaries: formats which incorporate the aesthetics and narrative devices of fictional and art film forms and which speak to and incorporate structures of fantasy and the unconscious.[6] These documentaries are rich enough to provide pleasure over and above the overtly informational, and invite and merit a second viewing in the ways that, for example, a news programme does not. While *Our Father the Serial Killer* is not *wholly* in this league, its composition is sufficiently thick to bear the burden of fantasy and trauma. Its narrative builds suspense through the slow revelation of facts and the deferral of knowledge, but also through the use of extra-diegetic music, its attention to landscape and locale, its fleeting use of horror film aesthetics. It is partly a psychological and partly a genre-based detective story, which builds to a climax in which the filmmaker confronts the by now very elderly father/serial killer in his own home and descends with him into the cellar.

This scene begins with the mobile camera circling the house, peering into the porch and through windows; drawing on a horror film lexicon of camera movement to disorientate the viewer, not only through its mobility but by positioning the viewer as the intruder in the domestic space of the Griggs's former family home. Griggs senior is discovered sitting in an armchair and is called to the door. The shock of this moment, for the viewer, lies partly in the frailty of this now elderly man whose shocking exploits loom so large over his children's lives and the film itself. After a discussion in which the father denies everything in a bemused and dismissive manner, he agrees to take Edginton into his cellar and proudly shows him round the dug-out and reinforced room. Such is the power of horror iconography that it is

6 John Corner, 'Television, documentary and the category of the aesthetic', *Screen*, vol. 44, no. 1 (1993), p. 94.

difficult not to imagine the bodies immured within. They are an absent presence in the sense that even if they do not exist literally they do exist within the logic of the film. The film ends with the camera's point of view, filming up the stairs and showing Griggs senior looming at the top, fleetingly a photographic still of his younger face is transposed onto him to malevolent effect. The tenor is one of menace; a signifier of the monstrous father buried within this seemingly benign character and within the home. The filming in this encounter rather heavy-handedly signals the uncanny – the camera peeping through the window to discover the killer in his lair. The sinister extra-diegetic music accompanies the unveiling of Griggs senior's photograph, this black-and-white image of the uniformed father is only teasingly revealed, like a striptease, from the feet to the head, deliberately invoking a horror film genealogy. The viewer is left in little doubt that Griggs senior is a bad man.

This dramatic and highly impressionistic climax, however, sits awkwardly in a format that operates more conventionally in investigatory and interrogatory modes and which is, overall, far more subtle than this moment suggests. One of the disquieting elements of the film is the contrast between established investigative documentary technique and the staging of distressing confessional scenes which are almost therapeutic in their intensity. These usually occur at the alleged scenes of crimes. In one example, Dianne drives to the location in which her father allegedly lured a young boy to his death. She recounts her childhood memory of how he persuaded the boy into the car and then sexually abused him in front of the two siblings. Her father then drove to a desolate well and threw the child down there, having taunted her brother to pull a knife on, and kill, the captive boy. In an intense and claustrophobic scene, Dianne convincingly recollects this event in a faltering and shaking voice punctuated by moments of complete breakdown. She sits in the front passenger seat of the car and the camera films from the rear – in the position and point of view of the filmmaker (and of the two Griggs children as recalled). She is shot in near silhouette – during her monologue viewers see only the back of her head. Her location in the intimate but depersonalized space of the car seems to jar with the clear surfacing of violent and disturbing memories. The filmed encounter clearly suggests the therapeutic mode, situating the journalist and the viewer as therapist listening in on another's private disturbed history delivered in monologue.

At the corner of the frame, through the side window of the car, her brother is clearly visible, walking the ground where the well is supposed to be. Agitated and distracted, he seems to represent the recollected father as much as himself. Intense and driven in appearance, he becomes a reconstructed illustration of Griggs senior and an extension of the therapeutic scene of memory and/or fantasy. We, for a moment, are made to appreciate the relative safety of the enclosed

vehicle as Steve roams around outside. In this, and other scenes, Steve himself becomes an elided figure whose meaning is increasingly multivalent: child victim, adult survivor, crime witness, dangerous individual. The imputation unfolds that Steve is potentially dangerous; that he is someone who not only bears his father's full name but whose identification with his father is as strong as his revulsion for him. Other scenes, such as one where Steve obsessively digs into a vault newly discovered on his land (reminiscent of his father's cellar), or the episode where the police reveal that they are nervous of being alone with him, reflects the growing insinuation on the part of the filmmaker that it is Steve himself who may be disturbed rather than (or as much as) his father.

This is very much a landscape of trauma in which the scrub-like terrain seen frequently throughout the documentary comes to signify the killing field, anonymous ground suitable for the concealment of serial killers' victims and emblematic of the spaces where child abuse could be enacted without disturbance.[7] Edginton follows brother and sister to what are presented as isolated lakesides, scrubland, a river's edge and vacated houses, all of which are alleged scenes of crime and constitute a form of psychic topography. The scenes are charged with emotion as the camera records Steve patiently fishing for body parts in the lake or pacing agitatedly through woodland with a spade in his hand. As Corner notes, television documentaries of this type embrace the 'impact of the picture not simply to be looked through, but to be looked at'; here landscapes and buildings require to be 'read as a discourse about the world rather than a depiction of it', as landscape becomes imbued with meaning – in this case memorials for traumatic events, possibly deaths.[8] The siblings claim that many journeys were made in their father's car and that ostensibly happy family trips were actually taken to stalk victims, bury body parts or molest his children. Both the car journeys that Edginton and the Griggs take as the documentary is filmed and the anonymous scrubland that they cover constitute fetish objects that stand in for the absent evidence. As the Griggs siblings drive or pace the scrub, they tell a story of slaughter for which there is no concrete proof – no bodies, bones, murder weapons, witnesses – yet throughout the documentary they insist on the truth of their account. They reiterate to the journalist, 'I know there is nothing there, but nonetheless . . .'. And every now and then the police manage to corroborate some small detail of their recollections – there was once a well in this isolated location which few people knew about; children do go missing. It seems nearly impossible to read the Griggs family drama as anything but contemporary family gothic horror, with the paterfamilias reminiscent of Tobe Hooper's nightmarish *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* disposing of bodies beneath the porch, in wells and in rubbish dumps as he travels with the children along the country's highways and byways.

7 For an extended discussion of the mythology of serial killers and their contribution to what might be called the 'psychic geography' of landscape, see Anita Biressi, *Crime, Fear and the Law in True Crime Stories* (London: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 164–85.

8 Corner, 'Television, documentary', p. 96.

Of course, the film is not only in dialogue with confessional television culture and horror film iconography, it also emerges from traditions of documentary practice and aesthetics that paved the way for factual television's contemporary engagement with the exhibition of trauma. The French cinema verite tradition and the filmmaking of the American Direct Cinema school have both been identified as influences in the development of British television documentary, particularly observational films (fly-on-the-wall and docusoaps) and other forms which are more properly designated 'reality TV'.[9] In contrast with Griersonian projects, both approaches eschewed the social responsibility agenda that required a degree of propaganda and exposition, preferring a more consistently observational mode. The two approaches do have some elements in common: valuing intimacy, immediacy and the 'real', and embracing the 'flaws' and edginess of more spontaneous styles of filming. Both approaches exhibited a commitment to the depiction of ordinary people and their lives that was groundbreaking in its sense of accessibility and intimacy. Both movements were aided by changing technologies that enabled a refined sense of immediacy and a sense of 'being there' at the profilmic event.[10]

Direct Cinema, exemplified by the work of Frederick Wiseman, Don Pennebaker, Richard Leacock and Robert Drew, favoured discrete observational filming with no attempt at analysis but instead 'revelation through situation'.[11] It provided an evidential basis on which audiences would be expected to assess the facts of a situation for themselves. Rather than construct a 'temporal framework' in the form of organized storytelling or rhythmic patterning through a shooting script, observational films chose to rely on editing to generate a sense of lived experience and time passing.[12] For these documentarists the story and its dramatization must be inherent within the film and any narration weakens its impact. In the making of these 'cutting-edge' documentaries, 'narration is what you do when you fail'.[13] Writing in the 1980s, Robert Drew argued that the best potential route for the popularization of documentary lay in the operation of what he referred to as 'filmic-dramatic principles'. Like the movies, the most accessible documentaries should refrain from controlling narration. 'Films that tell stories directly, through characters who develop through actions in dramatic lines – these have the possibility at least of allowing the power of film to build'.[14]

It might well be the case that Drew's analogy with fiction filmic principles is an attempt to bridge the ideological gap between what John Caughie refers to as the 'documentary gaze' and the 'dramatic look'.[15] The 'documentary gaze' refers to the nonfiction modes which 'observe the social space and the figures within it ... exploiting the "objectivity" of the camera to constitute its object as "document"'. This stands in contrast to the dramatic imperative which 'orders narrative space and, gives the spectator a place within it in a process of quite

9 A number of critics trace the lineage of reality TV back to these movements. See, for example, Sam Brenton and Reuben Cohen, *Shooting People: Adventures in Reality TV* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 21–5; Graham Barnfield 'From Direct Cinema to car wreck video: reality TV and the crisis of content', in Barnfield (ed.), *Institute of Ideas Reality TV: How Real is Real?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), pp. 47–66. See also Jon Dovey's discussion of the relationship between these movements and factual television in *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 29–30, 51–2.

10 In some academic and practitioner accounts of documentary history these two modes have been conflated, as the American school (and later British television documentarists) also adopted the term 'verite', but there are major differences between them. See Brian Winston *Claiming the Real: the Documentary Film Revisited* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 148–69.

11 Ibid., p. 150

12 In its idealized form they would avoid entirely commentary, self-reflexivity, extra-diegetic music, and so on, preferring synchronous sound, long takes, indirect speech and overheard dialogue – characteristics that chime with those of later observational documentaries and some forms of reality television. See Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 38–9.

13 Robert Drew, 'Narration can be a killer', in Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins (eds), *Imagining Reality* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 273.

14 Ibid., p. 271.

15 John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 110–11. See also John Caughie, 'Progressive television and documentary drama', *Screen*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1980), pp. 9–35.

literal identification'.[16] Drew is seeking to formulate the conditions of possibility for a *dramatic* observational documentary practice that refuses to intervene in any explicit way in the profilmic event; if achievable it would be the epitome of the dramatization of everyday life.

Cinema verite, on the other hand, was overtly interventionist; interrupting film subjects, interacting with them and even filming their responses to rough-cuts of film footage. This movement, most often associated with the work of French anthropologist Jean Rouch, worked within a tradition that was more auteur-based and essayistic.[17] In contrast with the American school, Rouch was more than happy to acknowledge that the presence of cameras affected film subjects, but he also argued that their presence prompted them to be *more* truthful and more authentically themselves.

The influences of cinema verite and Direct Cinema in terms of how they organized the field of vision are perceptible in subsequent television programming, although it was the latter that was destined to motivate, most profoundly, the development of television documentary practice. Television documentary, benefiting from technological developments which facilitated increased mobility and synchronous sound recording, embraced the impulse to minimize mediation and allowed itself 'to lay a stronger claim to the real than was possible previously'.[18] However, the legacy of cinema verite is also apparent in variants of the interactive documentary in which features of the verite style have become thoroughly normalized. The use of journalistic interview, editing to reveal contradictions in testimony and argument, the conspicuous presence of the filmmaker and/or crew, and the use of commentary that reflects on the filmmaking process are among the distinguishing features of the work of documentarists such as Errol Morris, Michael Moore and Nick Broomfield.

Erik Barnouw asserted that the difference between the Direct Cinema and the cinema verite filmmaker was that the former took a camera into a difficult context in anticipation of a crisis and the latter tried to precipitate one.[19] In terms of Direct Cinema, Stephen Mamber explains how the Drew films, for example, operate within a 'crisis structure' in which the film's momentum and its organizing principle is provided by an 'anticipated crisis moment'.[20] This structure is not a 'given' of documentary form but inherent already in fiction and, at its worst, 'the story would be a fictional element to support a non-fiction result. At best the story would be a true representation of an exciting period.'[21] The ideal story, then, is one in which there are a number of possible outcomes, some of them resulting in real crises; crises that do not need to be manufactured for the filmmaker. In Edginton's case, the situation of publicly made accusations would be fertile ground for the generation of crises. However it would seem that not all crises are filmically equivalent. Steve's revelation of the importance of his experience of abuse to his accusation of his father as a serial killer may well be a

16 Caughie, *Television Drama*, p. 111. The 'classic paradox' here is that the two, while both achieving a kind of 'realism', do so in radically different ways: one through the establishment of conventions that become invisible and the other by virtue of the very visibility of the medium, rough and ready filming and imperfections of all kinds.

17 Winston *Claiming the Real*, p. 184.

18 Brian Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentary* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 22.

19 Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: a History of the Non-Fiction Film*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1974) pp. 245–5.

20 Stephen Mamber, 'Cinema verite in America: Part II – Direct Cinema and the crisis structure', *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1972), p. 115.

21 Ibid., p. 117.

crisis moment for Steve, but it is arguably insufficiently filmic to constitute closure within the organization of the documentary. It is never explained why we do not witness the Griggs children confronting their father, but it seems clear that a confrontation must take place, albeit a relatively manufactured one between filmmaker and the accused.

In this context, Steve's moment of realization is reduced to one of a number of 'less important' crises that punctuate the film: emotional breakdowns or 'confessions' with which television audiences are already more than familiar from both observational documentary and popular factual programming. Nikolas Rose has tracked what he refers to as the increasingly dominant 'therapeutic imperative' to heal ourselves which is evidenced in such confessional and autobiographical representations.[22] He points to the ways that nineteenth-century disciplines prefixed with 'psy' – psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis – have moved away from being discrete fields of knowledge and become 'intellectual technologies' that both explain and render conspicuous certain facets of our behaviours and our relations with others.[23] These 'psy' technologies, albeit bowdlerized and misrepresented, have infused social and media space, through the popularization of trauma as mass entertainment, as well as the world of healthcare, lifestyle and employment. It is merely commonplace that Steve and Dianne are asked to 'speak' their memories of child abuse during the film. The siblings' claims are understood by viewers within this matrix of popularized 'psy' discourses which, as already noted, also occupy the public arenas of chat shows and radio confessionals. Any embarrassment at hearing, first-hand, personal accounts of distress is mitigated by its ubiquity in factual television programming. The first-person-singular mode of recollection and confession also has a disarming directness which seems to validate the perceived intimacy of the small screen.[24] And whereas literary autobiography, for example, offers an essentially private and intimate encounter, on television the encounter muddies the boundaries of private and public spheres.

In doing so, it also confuses moments of personal revelation with the revelatory and public imperative of effective filmmaking or storytelling, and such moments follow on parallel and sometimes connecting tracks. For example, Steve takes the filmmaker to his childhood home (not the house in which his father is later confronted). Standing in his bedroom, this is the point when Steve, for the first and only occasion, openly acknowledges the abuse he suffered at the hands of his father and recalls his childhood fear that he would never leave that room alive. If revelation and truth-telling are the objectives of documentary, then this should be the climax of the film – it seems to be the one moment when he acknowledges the centrality of his own abuse in the *private* family to his *public* story of serial killing. But the room is bare, clean and whitewashed. There is no visible sign of trauma and no apparent hope of a movement towards resolution, it does not have

22 Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: the Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 214.

23 Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 10–11.

24 The distress and anger of Arnold Friedman and his family in Andrew Jarecki's documentary, already cited, seems far more shocking and even embarrassing in the context of a film released as a feature and viewed by a mass audience. Somehow the privacy of domestic viewing provides some form of absolution against the guilty voyeurism of watching other people's angst.

the *overt* uncanniness of a 'crime' scene and there is no scope for confrontation. It is at this point that the absence of the signs of Steve's trauma, while perfectly comprehensible in analytic and temporal terms, is incomprehensible filmically.[25] As Bill Nichols notes, 'Witness and testimony, deposition and refutation, accusation and denial – all depend on direct encounter and physical presence', which never happens between Steve and his father in this film.[26] So, too, all the other real crimes that are invoked by the film (for example the boy found dead at the river's edge) remain unsolved. But the imperative of the documentary investigation means that we, as an audience, cannot be left here with matters unresolved. In a sense, Steve is left behind at this point because he has finally led the filmmaker to a dead end and Edginton takes on the lone role of pursuer, seeking to provide viewers with a more revelatory, more filmic, but also, ultimately, more ersatz moment of resolution. The encounter in the whitewashed room presages the filmmaker's later encounter in the darker recesses of Griggs senior's cellar.

In other words, the drive within the narrative for a public resolution cannot be accommodated in this more private scenario of Steve facing his past in the whitewashed room. An account of intimate injury, it is also, in keeping with this style of documentary, a process of accusation: of naming the abuser as part of publicly reclaiming the self. But once Steve has named his abuser the story moves on without him, turning out to be much more about the filmmaker's drive to resolve the social trauma of a random killer than the personal trauma of the film's subjects. In this way the documentary presents the pathology of its subjects in a form that lurches between the terribly intimate and the broader public myths that shape collective stories of dangerous spaces and dangerous people; between the private family and the public world of strangers in the woods, child killers and unforeseen violence.

In this example, the film becomes the space in which viewers confront not only the subjects' personal family ordeal but also their own broader anxieties about unprovoked violence as embodied in the mythology of the serial killer. J.S. La Fontaine explains in her study *Speak of the Devil* how experiences of child abuse by adult survivors become transformed into wider stories of satanic abuse in contemporary England and the USA.[27] She argues that bizarre allegations mask or explain away the dreadful fact that familial and community structures did not intervene to help the victim. The survivor's recollection of conspiracies and networks of ritual abusers ensure that there is always an irrefutable explanation for the lack of corroborative evidence and the lack of intervention. Furthermore, the enculturation of horror stories, religious iconography and its attendant discourses of good and evil provide a readymade lexicon for survivors to draw on that listeners will also recognize. This, together with the dominance of a therapeutic culture which encourages the telling and retelling of trauma in every detail, ensures a fertile reception for these

25 Elsaesser 'Postmodernism as mourning work', pp. 199–200.

26 Nichols, *Representing Reality*, pp. 232–3.

27 J.S. La Fontaine, *Speak of the Devil: Tales of Satanic Abuse in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

interpretations of individual trauma. These stories, like the Griggs story, provide comprehensible explanations for familiar childhood suffering and its lack of detection.

Crucially, these stories are the locus where therapeutic knowledge, personal trauma and media-driven popular knowledge interlock to produce something else: the intersubjective social/media space which Mark Seltzer calls 'wound culture'. For Seltzer, the continuing public fascination with stories of atrocity and serial murder reveals an erosion of distinctions between the body and the mind, the inside and the outside, the private and the public. He notes that 'the uncertain relays between private desire and public space in wound culture are nowhere clearer than in the ... resurgence, of the category of "the trauma" ... on the contemporary scene'.[28] Personalized documentaries, together with other vehicles for confession, autobiography, the display of psychic and corporeal trauma, and so on, are arguably symptomatic of the ongoing transformation in public culture; of the erosion of distinction between private and public, inside and outside, personal suffering and public anxiety. What this film demonstrates is that this erosion is complicated, conflicted and ethically loaded as the pathology of its subjects and their search for the truth of their experience has to be accommodated within a public documentary narrative form.

28 Seltzer, *Serial Killers*, p. 254.

I would like to thank participants at 'Media in Transition: Television', Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 18–20 April 2003 and the *Screen* Studies Conference, Glasgow University, 4–6 July 2003 for their thoughtful responses to earlier versions of this article. Thanks too to the helpful comments made by Heather Nunn and to the anonymous *Screen* reader.

Errol Morris: documentary as psychic drama

HEATHER NUNN

The media have ... become the last authority for self-perception, the 'reality test' of the social persona: I am seen, therefore I am.[1]

Two strategies run through Errol Morris's work. First, he interrogates documentary form and prompts analysis of how the filmmaker might use formal innovation to think through the perilous and value-laden relationship between – put crudely – the 'aesthetic' and the 'popular' in contemporary documentary. His work melds the innovation of experimental practice with the populist imperatives of tabloid culture. And second, intimately related to this hybridity, Morris's work clearly exemplifies the move within recent documentary to examine interior states, memory and psychic trauma. These two characteristics locate his documentaries within a broader move within television (signified by popular forms such as the talk show, magazine news and reality TV), which may be loosely defined as a relatively open process of 'working through', in which contemporary television provides 'a forum of contending definitions with no final result'.[2]

In recent analyses of television culture a number of critics have provocatively outlined the congruence between television as a mass media form and the public narrativization of traumatic events or experiences. Jon Dovey's account of contemporary first-person factual media in *Freakshow* locates the transformation and consolidation of television genres in the 1990s as one in which commodification and a market-led ethos have nonetheless been accompanied by 'new domains for the expression of identity'.[3] These televisual spaces are 'filled by voices proclaiming and celebrating their own "freakishness",

1 Ursula Frohne, '"Screen tests": media narcissism, theatricality and the internalized observer', in Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Weibel (eds), *Ctrl Space: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* (Boston, MA and Karlsruhe: MIT Press, 2002), p. 262.

2 John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), p. 84.

3 Jon Dovey, *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 4.

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articulating their most intimate fears and secrets'. The public disclosure and narrativization of personal identity is a crucial ingredient of a revitalized (and economically viable) factual television market. Entertainment media appropriate the 'real' feelings and emotions of 'real' people to signify credibility and 'unfiltered immediacy'.[4] The process of revelation is partly shaped by a self-conscious absorption in the emotions, desires, needs, pains and memories that the contemporary individual, attuned to a popularized psychoanalytic discourse, uses to understand his or her location in the world. The therapeutic discourses that pervade contemporary society reinforce notions of psychic and physical health, physical attractiveness, social integration and development, and interpersonal and career success as factors attendant on an eternal watchfulness. Emotion and self-monitoring of internal responses are integral to one's private and public persona. On the other hand, the desire to be watched, to be witnessed by others uncovering one's intimate identity, reveals the craving for an observer to witness the minutiae of one's social performance. The outpouring of anxiety and pop-psychological revelations on talk shows, in video diary rooms and on life-coaching programming reveals the extent to which television performance has become associated with social verification: 'I am seen, therefore I am'.

Morris draws on this popular disclosure of trauma and weaves it into documentaries that are also intrinsically about breaking down institutional and teleformal resistance to aesthetic innovation. In this sense, his work is cleverly an expropriation and rearticulation into documentary form of the characteristics of television as a domestic medium. In keeping with the paradoxical status of representational realism, Morris has positioned himself against documentary practice that prioritizes the anchored historical world over imaginary ones. He has suggested that cinema verite in the sense of fly-on-the-wall realism, for example, 'set back documentary film making twenty to thirty years' by presenting it as an 'odd species of journalism'. He claims there is 'no reason why documentaries can't be as personal as fiction film making and bear the imprint of those who made them'.[5]

We have seen, since the mid 1990s, a pervasive shift in the comprehension of the word 'documentary'. Morris's work could be located within the new-style 'poetic' documentary that permits an engagement with fantasy and illusion by organizing its material to produce emotional affect and even a dialogue with the 'collective consciousness'.[6] Importantly, to understand the therapeutic encounter in Morris's work we need to think about the traces it bears of earlier televisual innovations, in particular the first-person accounts in video diaries and chat shows. It shares with these an emphasis on confession and the to-camera addresses of the main subject or subjects. It also prioritizes a notion of 'incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective reconstruction'.[7] His documentaries work hard, with the twin aims of

4 Frohne, '"Screen tests"', p. 259.

5 Peter Bates, 'Truth not guaranteed: an interview with Errol Morris', *Cineaste*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1989) pp. 16–17.

6 Richard Kilborn and John Izod, *An Introduction to TV Documentary: Confronting Reality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 83.

7 Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 1.

destabilizing the sober discourses of documentary and challenging conventional modes of filming recollections of real, often traumatic, past events. He focuses frequently on individual memories and places these within a tapestry of archival, poetic and reconstructed scenes that prioritize the strange and often highly repetitive or ritualistic aspects of human behaviour. *Gates of Heaven* (1978), for example, explores the world of pet cemeteries, whilst *Vernon, Florida* (1981) focuses on a community of bizarre swamp dwellers. The film *Fast Cheap and Out of Control* (1997) is an exploration of a topiary gardener, a robot scientist, a lion tamer and a mole rat researcher; his documentaries frequently focus on bizarre individuals and their stories. In many of his films, moving imagery slows right down or is supplemented by stills that accentuate the strange composition of weird behaviour within everyday places. His commitment to the eccentricity of the ordinary person partly aligns his work with the photographic social observation of Diane Arbus or Martin Parr. He describes his films as 'mental landscapes' that combine the journalistic and the 'bold created image'.[8] They share with tabloid culture a love of the perverse or the 'exceptionally remarkable' ordinary person. His documentaries can be seen as artful, intelligent representations of offbeat characters, allowing them a dignity that belies Morris's claim that: ' I've always thought of my portraits as my own version of the Museum of Natural History ... these very odd diorama where you're trying to create some foreign exotic environment and put it on display'.[9]

Morris's work has been located within broader interrogations of the role of documentary in representing history within the context of reality television programming and 'the current post-MTV generation of spectator-consumers'.[10] He rejects a conviction in the evidential status of events and the documentary maker's hold on the power of visual imagery to consolidate his or her version of the truth. He has criticized documentary's claim to objectivity stating that:

> Often we like to reduce documentary to journalism and we like to feel secure about journalism – that we're not being tricked or betrayed or swindled or lied to. But no one really worries about it that much as long as it's being presented in the right idiom. As long as it looks real, people are delighted.[11]

Morris's work particularly plays with the tabloid end of journalism, borrowing and reworking its dramatic reconstruction of traumatic newsworthy events. In *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) (which re-investigates the trial of Randall Dale Adams, sentenced to capital punishment for the 1976 killing of a policeman in Dallas) Morris reconstructs sensational events from interview testimony not merely to undermine the veracity of the past investigation and trial but to undercut the documenting of that past in his own current filmic practice. As Linda Williams has claimed of *The Thin Blue Line*:

8 Inteviews with Morris can be viewed on his website. URL: http://www.errolmorris.com/html/archive_conversation.html.

9 Cited in Joshua Gamson, 'First person singular', *The American Prospect*, vol. 11, no. 11 (2000). URL: http://www.prospect.org/web/page.ww?section=root&name=ViewPrint&articleId=4297.

10 John Conomos, 'Errol Morris and the new documentary' (2000). URL: http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/8/sfferrol.html. See also Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, 'Personalising the documentary from video diary to Errol Morris', in *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), ch. 6.

11 Morris, in Andrew O'Hehir, 'Mr Death', in *Salon* (2000). URL: http://dir.salon.com/ent/movies/review/2000/01/14/mrdeath/index.html?sid=569603.

> The preferred technique is to set up a situation in which the action will come to [Morris]. In this privileged moment of *vérité* (for there are finally moments of relative *vérité*) the past repeats. We thus see the power of the past not simply by dramatizing it, or re-enacting it, or talking about it obsessively (though these films do all this) but finally by finding its traces, in repetitions and resistances, in the present.[12]

This description of Morris's technique arguably signals analogies between his filmic technique and the traumatic past events that are the frequent subject matter of his films: the technique perhaps capturing or attempting to replicate the indeterminate, always partial and necessarily mediated status of the recounted past. The truth then of Morris's documentaries is always relative and ultimately provisional. Morris himself claims that the re-enactments in *The Thin Blue Line* offer a 'wealth of visual contradiction': 'They're never illustrations of what I think the world is. They're illustrations of lies. They're all ironic. They, hopefully, teach you how images can't embody truth.'[13]

This 'wealth of visual contradiction' can also be found in Morris's *Interrotron Series* (Fox, 1995) which mixed high-tech studio interviews, dramatic reconstructions and news footage to tap into and unsettle the conventions of the tabloid-style talk show and confessional reality TV. The series used Morris's modified series of teleprompters, 'the Interrotron', a device that enabled him to interview his subjects without being in the same room. Via a projected video image of Morris on a glass plate, the interviewee interacts with him but appears to be speaking directly to-camera without apparent intervention. Such apparent direct contact intensifies the sense of intimacy of the interview and filmed closeup, the expressively lit faces of Morris's subjects become fascinating texts to be read for each slight modulation of expression or voice. The Interrotron enables Morris to be virtually eclipsed by the filming apparatus in a model that has been compared to the therapeutic process: 'The device intensifies the psychoanalytic valence of the film camera, operating as the equivalent of the impassive analyst in classical Freudianism'.[14] Developed during commercial advertising shooting, the Interrotron enabled Morris to succeed in the illusion of closeness to his subject whilst appearing to be absent from the filmic process. Many of the stories in this series are focused on the retelling of murder stories, and the first-person recollection in montage with news footage, talk show excerpts, reconstructions, location footage, ironic extra-diegetic music, and so on, compound the overall sense of not one truth but a series of partial perspectives. In this sense there is no clear dividing line between tabloid and avant-garde culture, factual representation and fictional embellishment. For, whilst Morris's work can be clearly aligned with a modernist technique in its use of montage, the self-reflexive play with technology and perspective and

12 Linda Williams, in Shawn Rosenheim, 'Interrotroning history: Errol Morris and the documentary of the future', in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), *The Persistence of History* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 219–34.

13 Morris, in O'Hehir, 'Mr Death'.

14 Rosenheim, 'Interrotroning history', p. 222.

the juxtaposition of factual and symbolic material, it is emblematic of contemporary popular news coverage – from talk shows to tabloid papers – for its use of the bizarre individual, the prioritization of human interest, emotion and scandalous story over fact and objectivity.

I will now concentrate on recent examples of Morris's work which use the Interrotron, particularly, *Stairway to Heaven* (1998), which depicts a female subject whose revelation is of a personal belief system informed and energized by her visceral encounters with death in a slaughterhouse. These experiences underpin her coping with, and making sense of, her autism. Here, Morris complements the woman's estrangement and her unique visual perception through expressive formal techniques. *Stairway to Heaven* was shown as part of the *First Person* series of eleven half-hour television documentaries broadcast on Bravo from May 2000 and on Channel 4 in 2001.The first-person accounts in the films are stories of traumatic aspects of his subjects' lives told to-camera in the first person, by each individual. The bizarre characters featured in the series include the cryogenic expert who stole his dead mother's head (*I Dismember Mama*); a woman who while writing a book about falling in love with a serial killer fell in love with a second one (*The Killer Inside Me*); the 'Unabomber's' pen pal (*Gary Greenberg, Unabomber Pen Pal*); the parrot who may have witnessed a murder (*The Parrot*); the director of a museum of medical oddities (*Gretchen Worden, Director of the Mutter Müseum*); and the woman who, after her son's messy suicide, became a cleaner at crime scenes (*Joan Dougherty, Crime Scene Cleaner*).

Morris's subjects, their address to camera, the half-hour format and their tabloid titles foreground their allegiance with tabloid culture. Psychoanalysis and its popularization are again crucial here, for they provide the documentary subjects with a ready language for addressing personal dilemmas. The assumption here (like the popular television talk show) is that what is spoken about provides the route to what is deeply felt. The documentary becomes one more stage in the coping, facing and working through of an individual distress. As indicated by the title of Morris's *The Killer Inside Me*, the personal trauma functions as an anchoring point for the documentary narrative. It functions at the centre of how the subjects experience their relationship between the past and the present, between their private self and the public self. And, most importantly, trauma functions as the enigma revealed: somewhat like the classical film narrative or, more appositely, film melodrama that proceeds via a flashback structure, the subject's story functions around telling how bits of the past patch together to cause present distress or present strategies of survival. The documentary then adds another layer to this imaginary capacity for self-representation and self-construction. The self-reflexivity here is twofold: at the level of the documentary subject who shares her or his personal story of their self-understanding with the audience; and, on a formal level, the self-reflexivity of the filmmaker who sometimes attempts to undermine the

power relations of the documentary process by foregrounding her or his own filmic control.

Morris's subjects are treated as articulate monologists, engaging with the spectator through direct, closeup accounts. Temple Grandin, the subject of *Stairway to Heaven*, stares into the Interrotron. As discussed above, the teleprompter enables the interviewee to maintain eye contact with Morris while gazing directly down the camera lens. Therefore the interviewee speaks in the first person and appears to address directly the audience without directorial intervention. Sharing perhaps a technological desire to capture the multi-perspectival 'reality' of recent reality television, as the *First Person* series developed, Morris moved to a modified Interrotron device with 'twenty cameras rolled into one' – which provided multiple unusual angles on his subject – a process of attempting to re-present states of mind, error and self-deception.[15] In keeping with the technique of the video diary, the self presented here to camera becomes a marker of integrity; the interviewee is primary guarantor of experience and knowledge. Here, again the conventional concerns of documentary segue with 'trash television' and are given shape through the discourses of the personal trauma. Morris's work then exemplifies a broader popular script in which subjects try to 're-inscribe themselves into different kinds of media-memory'.[16]

In all these documentaries, the subject often interprets the intense events – fear, abuse, extreme grief – through a ragbag of discourses: popularized psychoanalytic language, medical discourse, the language of human rights, legal discourse. Importantly, the documentaries also emphasize, and expand upon, the fictional or symbolic discourses used by Morris's subjects to add emotional tone – fairytale and urban myth, horror and crime story, religious imagery.[17] Both the self-conscious performance of Morris's protagonists and the role of popular and media culture in clothing those performances are emphasized. Morris's editing brackets Sondra London's accounts of her love affairs with two serial killers in *The Killer Inside Me* with her recollection of a romantic masochistic childhood fantasy of being swept up by the dark stranger bogeyman. The documentary includes video footage of London being serenaded by her second serial killer lover in a court room as he interrupts his hearing to perform to the court and to camera. London herself, in a home video, clad in a bizarre part vampire, part dominatrix leather costume, performs one of her poems on serial killers as 'fallen angels of death'. Referring to her current affair with a sadistic death row rapist and murderer, she concurs with Morris that her childhood fantasies have come true: 'Well I'm riding on the back of that grim reaper's horse that's for sure'. London explains her lover's evil nature through the mythic character Gemini – a figure of pure evil that possesses human beings. She invokes his self-description as 'a possessed puppet of flesh'. 'Evil is real', London warns the viewer. 'Evil walks this earth like a natural man.' This is the material of the talk show, but Morris goes one step further in revealing the self-

15 Philippa Campey, 'Errol Morris's *Stairway To Heaven*: an exploration of the first person narrative' (2002). URL: http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/13/cteq/stairway.html.

16 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), p. 199.

17 See also Anita Biressi's article on similar techniques used in true-crime documentary in this dossier.

consciously performative element of some of his subjects, implicitly suggesting this as motivation for both their individual behaviour and their consent to appear in his films. At the end of *The Killer Inside Me*, in extreme closeup, London acknowledges that she 'never wanted to be a repeatable person'; and she is certainly presented as unique and remarkable as the subject of this film.

In the *First Person* series, the accounts of trauma involve intellectualization of the real or imagined shocks or frights the subject has experienced. In *Stairway to Heaven*, Temple Grandin recounts two crisis points which constitute the trauma points of her narrative: the sensory overload of autism and a subsequent encounter with the enigma of death. Firstly, she recollects her childhood experience of autism before diagnosis. The sensory overload she experienced was of such unbearable intensity and, in recollection, so beyond her childhood sense of meaning, that her response was one of horrified incomprehensible alienation from the surrounding world. She painstakingly explains symptoms of her autism, the experiences of a world populated by 'an overwhelming tidal-wave of stimulation'. Everyday experiences are triggers for acute anxiety or fear: a scratchy petticoat feels like sandpaper 'rubbing off raw nerve endings'; a bell sounds like a jackhammer in her ear. As with many autistic subjects, Grandin thinks more clearly through visual imagery than through language. The documentary opens with Grandin's claim: 'I think in pictures. Pictures is (sic) my first language and English is my second.' The documentary then attempts to replicate this way of negotiating the world, capturing Grandin's sense that she has a video camera plugged into her forehead. Morris's film then can be interpreted, indeed sets itself up, as a process in which Grandin's account of initial trauma is integrated into a series of associations in which the original affect is partially revived as a slightly unreal scene. One device that gives this exploration structure is the sense of a journey, of slow, hallucinogenic movement accompanied by Caleb Sampson's impressionistic soundtrack and extracts from Aphex Twin's haunting ambient sound collection. For example, in a section titled 'Diagnosed Autistic' Grandin describes her autism as being like a ball in a pinball machine. Over her account we see slow-motion black-and-white images of a pinball ricocheting, accompanied by the click and whirr of the machine. As she compares the cattle's passage through the slaughterhouse system to people on a moving escalator at an airport, we see low-angle shots of people moving swiftly along the ramp, one behind the other, like the cattle, accompanied by atonal music.

This skill with visual imagery is shown as the key to Grandin's alleged ability to empathize with a cow's mindset. After experimentation, she finds that by being strapped into a cattle inoculating squeeze chute, held for forty-five minutes and rhythmically squeezed by the soft leather padded sides, her nerves are calmed – what she calls her 'neurotransmitter adjustment'. With a certain irony she

states that this self-made cure for her 'anxiety attacks', where 'soothing feelings' wash over her and she experiences the feeling of 'being held in order to have nice kind thoughts', is the source of her psychologists' anxiety and they try, unsuccessfully, to take it away from her.

The documentary underlines Grandin's self-acknowledged pragmatism: a symptom of her autism. Her literality and so-called logicality mean that religion, for example, is too abstract a concept for her, and consequently death becomes a secondary trauma that attaches itself to her earlier helplessness in the face of autism. When she wants to find out about death and conventional interpretations fail, she enters a slaughterhouse – an experience that she renders spiritual: 'I wanted to find out what happens when you die. Regular religion was too abstract, it was just meaningless, the slaughterhouse was real.' This chain of associations led to Grandin's current occupation as designer of humane slaughterhouses – her 'stairway to heaven' is a spiral ramp which uses optical illusions to lead livestock calmly from the pen to the bolt gun and is used by one third of all slaughterhouses in the USA. Grandin here, like the talk-show confessor, invokes an origin or absent cause for her particular graphic and visual skills and for her present self-identity and motivation. Paradoxically, there is both an unwavering pragmatism in her negotiation of traumatic events and a proclivity for fragmentation, repetition and non-linearity in her recollections, despite her claim to detailed recall. The slaughterhouse then becomes the central trope in Morris's film, displacing from and supplanting the trauma of autism and, in Grandin's narrative, fulfilling the role of a useful and controllable symbol of her singular ethical expertise in animal slaughter – a skill supplanting, but implicitly linked to, an earlier horrified incomprehension of her autism.[18]

Morris uses devices throughout the documentary including intertitles, found footage, music, dramatized sequences, photo stills and ambient sounds to render Grandin's process of memory and her belief system. These stylistic traits give an affective dimension to her monologue. They sometimes elude clear comprehension but still succeed in avoiding turning her into raw material for poetic expression alone. Grandin's personal experience is also a metaphor for the filmic process. For just as the cattle are led trustingly to their slaughter by a series of optical tricks, so the spectator is led through the film through a visual pattern of passages: dream imagery of opening doorways from Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, slow spinning graphics of a window frame, slow-motion car journeys, detailed closeups of slaughterhouse plans, canted camera views of cattle in pens, of suburbia, black-and-white stills of Grandin amidst the cattle.

Furthermore, the self-exposure of Morris's subjects – as in reality TV, talk shows or other forms of confessional culture – operates as a kind of 'prosthetic trauma' for the community of viewers who, as mediated witnesses, vicariously experience the cathartic reliving of the traumatic event. Relevantly John Ellis, in *Seeing Things*, has

18 Interestingly, Harold Rosen cites Oliver Sacks's response to Temple Grandin's autobiography *Emergence: Labelled Autistic* (Warner Books, 1986) in which she speaks of the slaughterhouse in detail. Oliver Sacks, in *An Anthropologist on Mars* (London: Random House, 1995) comments on Grandin's recollection of being spied upon by a slaughterhouse manager who was allegedly trying to discover how she calmed excited animals. Struck by Grandin's vivid memory, he states: 'It was as if the original scene (with all its attendant feelings) was reproduced with virtually no modification. This quality of memory seemed to me both prodigious in its detail and pathological in its fixity.' See Harold Rosen, *Speaking From Memory: the Study of Autobiographical Discourse* (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 1998), p. 127.

highlighted television's role in constructing the viewer as witness through its repetitious playing out of traumatic events. He argues that this witnessing is 'a new form of experience; it arrived with the development of mechanical media which accord with how we perceive everyday reality'; television's popular conception as a domestic 'window' onto external crises – war, death, famine, violence and their aftermath – enabled its viewers to experience traumatic 'events at a distance, safe but also powerless, able to over-look but under-act'.[19]

As trauma demands a witness to note the validity of recovered incidents and that witness then bears the weight of consolidating the 'truth' of the 'victim', so Morris's documentaries demand the viewer bear the weight of knowing responsibility. At once distanced and involving, mediated and yet compelling in their intimacy, the audience is invited to judge, through tears, shock, disbelief, laughter or by changing channels, the authenticity or relevance for them of the retold event.[20] Such witnessing foregrounds the importance, but also the impotence, of the viewer's experience as judge of the ontological status of a traumatic event he or she can never fully know as 'real'.

In Morris's documentaries, the sense of intimacy between viewer and subject is partly undermined by his infrequent directions and questions to his subjects. His screen persona is often revealed towards the end of the documentary when he breaks the illusion of the to-camera address to ask the subject a leading question from offscreen. At the end of *The Killer Inside Me,* Morris intervenes to ask London, 'Why this attraction to serial killers?'. She retorts, 'What a lame question, you can do better than that'. Which he does, rephrasing the question until she answers. In *Stairway to Heaven* he asks Grandin to recite a poem written by her blind roommate. Grandin asks the offscreen Morris how she should pose whilst reciting the poem, should she lean back, would this make her look strange, should she recite now? This interchange and the starkly downlit face of Grandin looking up, as though to heaven, as she recites to Morris's instructions, reminds us of the power of the hitherto concealed filmmaker.[21] It also undercuts our status as witness or confessor: the absent third party to whom all Morris's subjects appear to speak directly. Such revelations of the filmmaker's controlling subjectivity and the undermining of that control deliberately reveal the documentary as a dynamic intersubjective process. Morris's work is self-consciously expressive – concealing, then revealing, authorship.

Death is the absent presence at the core of many of Morris's documentaries. Morris's subjects haunt the slaughterhouse, they clean up after violent crime and they steal the head from their mother's corpse. Here the logic and rationality of science segues with the 'unnameable dread' of our collective tales of horror. Death here is pragmatic and everyday but also powerfully enigmatic. It is central to Morris's short films and is also present in longer works such as *The Thin Blue Line* and *Mr Death.* In the *First Person* series Joan

19 Ellis, *Seeing Things,* p. 15.

20 Ibid., p. 197.

21 Here, Bill Nichol's use of the term 'voice' to signal both the physical voice and the authorial imprint of the filmmaker is relevant to Morris's technique. See Nichols in Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: a Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 164.

Dougherty, the crime scene cleaner, literally scrubs up the detritus of violent death once the forensics experts have departed. In her story she recalls the messy aftermath of her son's suicide. Sondra London's story is littered with death – John Schaefer, her first lover, killed two women and was linked to around thirty other missing women. Temple Grandin eloquently describes her invention, the spiral stairway, which enables the calm passage of cattle to the bolt gun; their ultimate death remaining notably absent from her meticulous account.

Death is a fetishized object for many documentary filmmakers because in their desire to capture the real, whether in objective or subjective form, death can both 'powerfully convey a sense of reality' but 'it is also the place where the real ends'.[22] In response, documentary frequently seeks the defining fact – the assassinated President, the war or murder victim – whose ultimate moment and the story leading to that moment are retroactively sought. These moments are not always retrievable; a bit like the 'traceless traces' of the trauma story.[23] Death then represents a conundrum for documentary, as Vivian Sobchack has argued: 'while death is generally experienced in fiction films as representable and often excessively visible, in documentary films it is experienced as confounding representation, as exceeding visibility'.[24] Morris's work, unlike many conventional documentaries, does not rely on an authoritative historical or social referent to anchor the absent presence of death that is frequently the backdrop to his subject's idiosyncratic post-traumatic stories.[25] Instead death is offered as the catalyst for extravagant, sometimes absurd, personal responses shot though with pathos. Death works on many levels in Morris's films. Most simply, Morris has partly aestheticized the stuff of tabloid culture: death, violence, sex interwoven with the bizarre. But I suggest that his work also knowingly demands psychoanalytical interpretation and borrows from a contemporary popularized therapeutic culture. Violence, sex, murder, death: this is also the meat of psychoanalysis, the intellectual tabloid of our culture. More broadly, Morris's work highlights an intrinsic relationship between trauma and death; individuals' traumas as they are retold for the television camera conceal a more general psychocultural anxiety about death. Here, the status of Morris's work as personalized documentary is notable.

Since the 1990s, survival has become a prominent theme in the public narratives that subjects tell to the media. As these confessing subjects of factual programming compete for singularity and for redress in an increasingly crowded media forum; and as the programmes themselves compete for status and resources, the stories of trauma become more bizarre. These personal stories, then, of trauma, violence and death could be viewed as both a record of individual psychopathology but also as a cultural trope – 'a strategic fiction that a complex, stressful competitive world is using to account for a world that seems threateningly out of control'.[26]

22 Arild Fetveit, 'Reality TV in the digital era: a paradox in visual culture?', in *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 21, no. 6 (1999), p. 798.

23 Elssaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', p.194.

24 Vivian Sobchack in Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, p. 48.

25 In Morris's recent film documentary *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert McNamara* (2003), the former US secretary of defence Robert Strange McNamara, a key figure in the Cuban missile crisis and arguably the prime architect of the Vietnam War, is portrayed as not so much unreliable as flawed: evasive in his self-proclaimed certainty; self-congratulatory in the maxims that he latches to crucial political decisions ('in order to do good, you have to be willing to do evil'); and ultimately unable to admit personal responsibility or inadequacy in the face of momentous historical decisions.

26 Kirby Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 2.

Using 'network' theory in the post-network era: fictional 9/11 US television discourse as a 'cultural forum

AMANDA D. LOTZ

It is likely that the appliance known as 'television' is too multifaceted, broad and contradictory ever to be understood as a coherent entity, despite efforts to theorize it as such. Shifts over the past two decades in the industrial operation, technological form and breadth of content of the box that is simultaneously a mere appliance and a cultural arbiter have appropriately inspired new reflections and retheorization. Whether described as a transition from a classical network system to a post-network era – as has been the dominant conversation in the USA – or theorized as a transition from an era of scarcity through one of availability to one of plenty, as suggested by one recent British work,[1] there appears to be agreement that the object of study is shifting in significant ways. These changes in television as an object of inquiry necessitate reassessment of the theoretical lenses through which we have viewed this significant industrial, technological and cultural artefact.

The most profound changes require that we reconsider television's status as a mass medium. Television remains a ubiquitous media form and a technology widely owned and used in the USA and many similarly industrialized nations, but the vast expansion in the multiplicity of networks streaming through its corporeal structure has diminished the degree to which cultures encounter television viewing as a common experience. Television arguably remains the most 'mass'

1 John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Tauris, 2000).

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medium, but its content has grown more narrowly targeted so that the audience at any one moment is often more accurately theorized as a collection of niches rather than as a mass.

This redefinition of television's sociocultural operation requires reassessment of theories constructed to understand the medium in its network era context. Most of the foundational theories guiding the study of television were developed at a specific moment in which a particular set of institutional operations governed global norms for the international media industry. These norms of institutional relations and practices have changed in both subtle and radical ways since the establishment of foundational models, and these theoretical frameworks now require reassessment to account for institutional and cultural changes.

In the case of US television, the emergence of new broadcast competitors and the overwhelming penetration of cable and satellite systems with their delivery of a vast multiplicity of networks are but two of many changes that have altered the US television industry, while other national contexts have experienced similar expansions in both public and privately operated networks. Television continues to occupy a central place in US media use, but the degree to which broad audiences share content has eroded significantly as a consequence of the expansion in programming providers. Although the 'hardware' of television technology has changed slightly, its 'applications' have multiplied extensively, altering audiences' perception of 'television' and necessitating address of the most basic question, 'what is television?', in this emergent cultural and institutional environment.[2] Much foundational media theory is rooted in the presumption of widely shared texts, and the degree to which a truly mass audience sees fewer and fewer common texts necessitates reconsideration of this and other assumptions supporting the critical study of television.

In this essay I focus on Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch's 'cultural forum model' of television, and attend to some of its less frequently emphasized aspects in the task of determining how it may or may not remain a valuable model for the critical analysis of television texts. As an object, 'television' was once more simple and understandable as a fairly monolithic entity. At that time, universalizing models offered exceptional explanatory value. Various industrial and cultural factors redefining 'television' require that those who study the medium pay closer attention to the model they use relative to the phenomenon they seek to study. Grounding television scholarship in theories that address how the post-network era adjusts the object of study necessitates that we explore how the changed institutional environment has altered many of the assertions, rightly assumed by the cultural forum model, which now seem of questionable validity.

The essay closes with an application that illustrates the continued utility of the cultural forum model in examining a topic or theme present across a variety of programmes or episodes. In the months

2 See Charlotte Brunsdon, 'What is the 'television' of television studies?', in Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (eds), *The Television Studies Book* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 95–113.

following the events of 9/11 in New York and Washington, at least fourteen hours of fictional dramatic narrative dealt with themes such as racial profiling and stereotyping, privacy erosion, suspension of due process rights, possibilities for activism, and the general altered reality resulting from the fear engendered by the attacks. The cultural forum is the model best used to explore such a narrative phenomenon because of its tools for incorporating the breadth of texts and the multiple valences of their stories. Understanding television to create a cultural forum in its broadest sense also requires the consideration of non-narrative texts such as news and documentaries. Focusing on only the forms of narrative storytelling that receive less critical attention, however, reveals the continued viability of the cultural forum, as well as types of research to which it is not as well-suited as a critical framework.

Television as a cultural forum

The supposition that television as a medium creates a cultural forum underpins much existing critical television scholarship, although this is not always explicitly stated. This foundational model, initially proposed in 1983, focuses aspects of the approach to studying culture emerging in British cultural studies on US television.[3] With this model, Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch attempt to reconcile divergent approaches and emphases resulting from the bifurcated intellectual history of much US media scholarship by blending the approach of communication scholars who studied television as a *communication medium* with that of film and literary scholars who considered it an *aesthetic object*. Newcomb and Hirsch's essay goes beyond the titular naming of a model for studying television to offer an explanation of one of the central questions in media studies – how a commercial mass-mediated form presents content with varying ideological valences. The cultural forum model contains at least three interrelated assertions that argue for the significance or consequence of television as a mass medium, assertions related to the scope of television's reach, its ability to provide a space for the negotiation of ideological positions, and as a process-based system of representation and discourse. The cultural forum model consequently has supported a broad range of scholarship that examines television with recognition of its complexity, although some have added a clearer statement of the operation of power within the model.[4]

The title of Newcomb and Hirsch's essay suggests the first of three assertions maintained by the model through assumptions one might make about the scope required of a medium for its influence to be significant enough to create a 'cultural forum'. Television provides a cultural forum precisely because of its vast reach both in terms of geography and culture. Three national networks defined US 'television' in the network era of the article's composition. When audiences or scholars referred to television, they meant ABC, CBS and NBC, and

3 Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch, 'Television as a cultural forum', in Horace Newcomb (ed.), *Television: the Critical View* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 503–15. Originally published in *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Summer 1983).

4 Horace Newcomb's 1984 article, 'On the dialogic aspects of mass communication', might be read as a coda to his contribution to the culture forum model, as he adds an explanation of the operation of power missing from the work coauthored with Hirsch. Here, he roots his textual analysis in theories of hegemony emerging at that time from British cultural studies, and uses a version of hegemony more flexible than that utilized by scholars such as Gitlin. Horace Newcomb, 'On the dialogic aspects of mass communication', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1984), pp. 34–50.

perhaps on occasion PBS or a few particularly vibrant independent stations. The scope assertion follows Newcomb's 1974 statement on the significance of television study that argues, 'Television is a crucially important object of study not only because it is a new "form", a different "medium", but because it brings its *massive* audience into a direct relationship with particular sets of values and attitudes'.[5] The heterogeneity of network era audiences' psychographic features and tastes contributed to the compelling nature of the cultural forum model and similar media theories. The scope reached by television content made early arguments for its significance highly compelling because of its status as such a widely shared media form.

The second assertion of the cultural forum model is that as a medium, television provides a space for the negotiation and discussion of ideological positions. This tenet is characteristic of British cultural studies theory in its allowance for even corporatized mass media content to be the site of contradictory and complex ideological messages.[6] Of television, Newcomb and Hirsch write: 'In its role as central cultural medium it presents a multiplicity of meanings rather than a monolithic dominant point of view'.[7] Relatedly, the authors also assert that television 'does not present firm ideological conclusions – despite its *formal* conclusions – so much as it *comments on* ideological problems'.[8] In this way the forum model diverges from other foundational scholarship that asserts a more powerful and singular voice for television in perpetuating dominant ideology.

The final assertion of the cultural forum model particularly relevant to the reconsideration I provide here is its emphasis on human interaction with television as a process. Newcomb and Hirsch stress that television must be considered beyond isolated utterances of episodes, days or series, but as a 'whole system that presents a mass audience with the range and variety of ideas and ideologies inherent in American culture'.[9] This broad understanding of television as an entity more encompassing than a single viewing experience, or as an object of study that cannot be adequately minimized to a single series or set of episodes, is particularly valuable to the questions considered by academic critics. This assertion suggests the need to deliberate upon the notion of television units, which becomes particularly crucial in the post-network era. The authors' attention to understanding television through ritualistic views of communication is also relevant here and reasserts a conception of television content as process rather than object.

This emphasis on understanding the relationship between television and culture as a process is similar to the theory of television as 'working through' proposed by Ellis.[10] Ellis's recent work presents a thorough reconsideration of the theoretical consequences of television's changes to date, yet he does not directly explore the consequences of the redistribution of audiences (perhaps because this has not yet occurred as significantly in the British context). Ellis notes that

5 Horace Newcomb, *TV: the Most Popular Art* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), p. 244. My emphasis.

6 The article draws from Stuart Hall, 'Encoding and decoding in the television discourse', in *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), pp. 128–38, to make this assertion.

7 Newcomb and Hirsch, 'Television as a cultural forum', p. 506.

8 Ibid, p. 508. Emphasis in original.

9 Ibid.

10 Ellis, *Seeing Things*, pp. 74–129.

'Television can be seen as a vast mechanism for processing the material of the witnessed world into more narrativized, explained forms', which is an assertion similar to that argued by the cultural forum and supports the argument presented here.[11] Ellis does acknowledge that the breadth of content that audiences now choose from diminishes the social importance of any programme, but he does not address how this might be incorporated into theorizing the 'social forum' that television creates.[12] 'Working through' may describe the *process* of meaning making, but it is now the case that diverse populations work through markedly different content and ideas as a result of substantial variance in the television content that serves as stimuli. By interrogating our assumptions of television's scope and selecting units of analysis relevant to the institutional context that we study, models such as the cultural forum can be retheorized to account for the disparity in viewing now common.

11 Ibid, p. 78.

12 Ibid, p. 72.

US television's changed institutional environment

The cultural forum model assumes the operations of the network era of US television, a time during which only three networks competed for the attention of viewers. From the wide-scale availability of television from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, networks ABC, CBS and NBC provided viewers' only choice.[13] In this three-way race, most series had to draw more than 30% of those watching television to remain on the air, and successful series might attract as much as 40% of the audience. Although the level of television viewing among the population has remained relatively constant and even increased, viewers now choose from many more options. The gradual distribution of cable first altered the range of options for many viewers. In 1980 only 19.9% of households subscribed to cable; a figure that grew to 50% by 1988. In 2004, more than 85% of US households received channels either by cable or satellite,[14] and those homes received an average of one hundred channels.[15]

For those who receive programming via cable or satellite, as well as those still receiving signals over the air, additional broadcast competitors also changed the terrain and expanded programme offerings. Fox first began broadcasting in 1986, and networks The WB and UPN emerged a decade later. The development of all of these new programming outlets has gradually eroded the mass audience. Where 90% of those watching television watched broadcast networks at the beginning of the 1980s, by the decade's end the figure amounted to only 64% due to increased viewership of cable networks.[16] Network share continued to decline during the 1990s, although not at such a sharp rate; by 2002–2003, the seven broadcast networks and the advertising-supported cable networks both claimed a 50% audience share, with cable lagging by only two-tenths of one ratings point.[17]

Examining changes in the ratings of the thirty most viewed shows

13 The exceptions were independent stations (those not affiliated with a network), and public stations whose formal structure was established in 1967 and counted approximately 250 stations nationwide. See Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: a Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002), p. 232.

14 Initiative Media, *Today in National Television*, 9 April 2004.

15 Nielsen Media Research, *TV Audience* (New York, NY: Nielsen Media Research, 2003).

16 John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 11.

17 Stephanie Spady, 'Primetime update: 2002–03 full broadcast year', *Media Insights: MAGNA Global USA*, 24 September 2003.

provides another way to quantify the change in viewing. In the network era of three dominant US networks, the top thirty programmes earned ratings between twenty and thirty, a number that indicates the percentage of households with televisions who were watching that programme. For example, in the 1959–60 season, *Gunsmoke* was the most watched programme and drew an average rating of 40.3, while *The Perry Como Show* and *Lassie* tied for twenty-ninth with a rating of 23.1. By the 1998–99 season, a point by which a transition to a post-network era was evident, the highest rated series earned a 17.8 rating (*ER*), while a programme could rank in the top thirty with a rating of nine. In 2002–03, the most watched series (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*) earned a 16.3 rating and the thirtieth-placed show rated only 7.7.[18]

It is not that some other giant emerged to supplant the dominant place of the once invulnerable Big Three networks, but instead down to the steady assault of a plurality of Lilliputians. Drawing 2% of viewers remains a noteworthy accomplishment for many cable networks, but that 2% multiplied by ten networks and the 1% drawn by another ten now adds up to a significant absence of broadcast viewers. Fortuitously for the Big Three, many advertisers still seek to use their television dollars to reach the widest possible audience with a single advertisement, which has prevented the broadcast networks from seeing their advertising rates substantially compromised by the competition.[19] With broadcast erosion continuing, however, it is only a matter of time until advertisers flee in greater numbers to the substantially lower cost per thousand viewers available on cable.

Other adjustments suggesting the transition to a post-network era also exist, but are less relevant to reevaluating the utility of the cultural forum model as a theoretical base for the critical study of television. The establishment of three additional broadcast networks and the foothold gained by a multitude of cable networks suggest that assumptions about the scope of particular television programmes are now in question. The post-network era directly alters the conditions upon which the model's first assertion is based, but the degree to which this first assertion serves as a linchpin also calls the others into question. The utility of the cultural forum model is not lost; however, the post-network transition does require attention be paid to how it is applied and increased emphasis on its other assertions.

Reconsidering post-network us television as a cultural forum

The most basic question that begins this inquiry then is whether television truly does continue to provide a cultural forum given the extent of audience dispersion in the post-network era. The model takes 'television' as its object of study, an entity that at one time seemed coherent and comprehensible when limited to three outlets. The alterations of the post-network era, however, challenge previous understandings of 'television' so that a shared definition is less clear.

18 Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2003), pp. 1455–72.

19 For example, the cost to advertisers to reach a thousand viewers (CPM) averaged $15 on broadcast while only $9 on cable. Steve McClellan, 'Discovery challenge', *Broadcasting & Cable*, 18 November 2002, pp. 18–20, p. 18. Also see John M. Higgins and Allison Romano, 'Cheaper by the thousand', *Broadcasting & Cable*, 4 February 2002, pp. 20–28.

Addressing the continued viability of the cultural forum model and considering 'what is "television" in the post-network era' are not esoteric theoretical exercises lacking practical use. Refining theoretical tools better enables us to address industrial and policy questions that bear material consequences. Reassessing foundational models and understandings of the relationships between cultural texts, their institutional creators and the society that receives them is just as important as work attempting to explain and theorize new developments. Critical perspectives must acknowledge how the object of study has changed because the adjustments may make once valuable topics and lines of inquiry increasingly irrelevant. The significance of a single television series, if studied with an emphasis on its cultural or social contribution, decreases if it is not widely shared. There are vast and varied programming options available in the post-network era, but a show viewed only by one million viewers requires a different framework for analysis than one viewed in the same era by eight million, or a series viewed by twenty million in the network era. With the ample variation in audience size that now exists, we must be careful to address these variations and not assume all television content to be equivalently significant, particularly when inquiries centre on ideological contributions.

On some level it is readily apparent that few if any television series airing currently – or even in the 1990s – could be said to have enacted a cultural forum in the same way as series such as *Father Knows Best* from the 1950s, *All in the Family* from the 1970s, or *The Cosby Show* which ran from 1984 to 1992. Of course post-network series continue to perform the cultural forum process for the audience members viewing them, but they are decreasingly seen by mass and heterogeneous audiences. The situation in the post-network era is reminiscent of the adage questioning whether a tree falls in the forest if there is no one there to hear the sound. With so many other options available, it is increasingly unlikely that ideologically polarized audiences view the same series, particularly those known for transcending dominant norms. For example, it seems reasonable to expect that the audience of a show such as *Queer as Folk* (2000–) is a self-selected niche that deliberately seeks out specific non-mainstream content, making the audience and its relationship to programming very different than in the network era.

So if a series or aspect of television presents a view contradicting or negotiating dominant ideological perspectives, and no one but those critical of the dominant ideology sees it, is its challenge to hegemony diminished? What can *Queer as Folk* accomplish if the audience's knowledge of the series leads homophobes to ignore it? The niche-specific audience that makes such a show possible arguably also prevents it from enacting the consciousness-raising some have suggested a series such as *All in the Family* achieved.[20] In another case, media critics often posited that an increase in the depictions of

20 See Janet Staiger, *Blackbuster TV* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), p. 193 fn. 60, for a review of this research.

African–Americans on television would help decrease racism and ethnic prejudice within society. The number of black characters and roles have increased since the 1980s, but consequences of the post-network era on audience composition call into question earlier theories about the social tolerance such a presence would indicate. Although the number of US situation comedies featuring African–American casts increased throughout the 1990s, comedy audiences simultaneously became segregated alongside the bifurcation of sitcom casts.[21] The increasing number of comedies starring black actors arguably has not resulted in a corresponding increase in those images and stories being seen by white audiences. Network-era standards of relevance and significance do us disservice in a changed industrial context if analyses do not account for institutional alterations.

A model for adapting to the adjusted industry logic appears if we look to programmers and executives in the television industry. As Michael Curtin notes, 'industry discourse about the mass audience no longer refers to one simultaneous experience so much as a shared asynchronous cultural milieu'.[22] The industry has adjusted its strategies in response to the multiplicity of programme providers so that competitors now seek both the broad blockbuster hit *and* the niche success with clearly defined 'edge'.[23] Television networks have responded with original-run repurposing (airing series on both broadcast and cable networks during the series' first run), by measuring audiences based on the multiple airings of the show rather than single airings, and by closely watching for audience overlap across various networks and ways to expand these crossover audiences. Many practices and standards of the network era continue to operate, others have been adjusted, and others yet eliminated and replaced to respond to the dynamic nature of the period.

As a medium, television retains its status as the primary storyteller in US society (at least as of 2004), but the multitude of content now available makes it impossible to speak of television in generalities. The fact that audiences have fragmented among various networks and programmes requires that critics revise the scope of their analyses in an effort to respond to the adjusted status of the forum. As David Hesmondhalgh notes, 'digital television' (and I would suggest the broader post-network related changes) 'may mean that individual channels and programmes have less public impact and power than in the analogue era'.[24] Although he uses this as a reason to emphasize the power now held by the process of circulation in the circuit of culture, textual analysis remains informative if based in theories that account for the specificity of the post-network era. This seems to make individual series and networks less significant and requires us to search for trends, discourses, and representations that occur across networks and series. This assertion does not contradict the forum model as it was written – the emphasis on cross-programme analysis supported by the 'viewing strip' certainly suggests a comprehensive analysis – but more

21 See, among many other journalistic accounts, James Sterngold, 'A racial divide widens on network TV', *The New York Times*, 29 December 1998, p. A1.

22 Michael Curtin, 'Feminine desire in the age of satellite television', *Journal of Communication*, vol. 49, no. 2 (1999), pp. 55–70, p. 60.

23 Michael Curtin, 'On edge: culture industries in the neo-network era', in Richard Ohmann, Gage Averill, Michael Curtin, David Shumway and Elizabeth Traube (eds), *Making and Selling Culture* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 181–202.

24 David Hesmondhalgh, *The Culture Industries* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 229.

has been made of the scope and space for negotiation aspects in the model's application.[25] The post-network era requires an emphasis on definitions of television stressing the breadth of content available and the notion of television viewing as a process that is not isolatable to a single moment, episode or series, instead of the importance of television based on its scope. Adding this emphasis to the application of the forum model does require that those using it subsequently reassess how they theorize the operation of power.

Below I will illustrate how the cultural forum model still provides a valuable framework for analyzing the contribution of television texts to the construction and circulation of ideology and the cultural negotiation of ideas and values, particularly if we account for adjustments in the programming environment. The cultural forum model remains of great value if we define television as it now exists as a diffuse medium, rather than narrowly confined to an individual series, episode or similar unit. Understanding that we can only speak of an aspect of television – not television as a whole – and that we must comprehend the breadth of television, yet speak of it with specificity, helps reintroduce the pervasiveness of its messages that now reach a more narrow scope at the level of the individual programme.

25 See Newcomb, 'On the dialogic aspects', pp. 44–9; Horace Newcomb, 'One night of prime time: an analysis of television's *multiple voices*', *in* James Carey (ed.), *Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), pp. 88–112.

9/11-related discourses in dramatic fictional television

Many media critics focused their analyses on news media in the weeks and months following the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, but few have acknowledged the negotiation of ideas, fears and values evident across a range of dramatic fictional television series. This case provides a prime example of the limitations of using the cultural forum as a foundation for analyzing the ideological contribution of textual content – if only considering a single text. Such an approach may have been adequate in the network era of television production and reception, but in the post-network era such isolated examinations fall short of indicating anything beyond the series or episode in question and do not comment on the significance of television as a component of the culture industry, as much of such scholarship often suggests. When examining a topic or theme in the post-network era we must cast our nets wider so that we allow the range of content produced to determine the boundaries of our inquiry instead of imposing limitations that may disqualify our statements. Even then, our analyses speak only of the aspect we examine, in this case dramatic television series in the 2001–2002 season, and we must seriously deliberate before asserting that our findings can be considered representative of anything larger.

During the eight months from October 2001 to May 2002, television audiences could find sophisticated stories linked implicitly and sometimes explicitly to the disastrous events of 11 September 2001,

and the pain, fear and anxiety that these events created, in some twelve series spread across seven networks. These stories were mostly stand-alone episodes (not part of ongoing serial storylines), nevertheless unobtrusively motivated by the franchise or setting of the series. In most cases these episodes were not promoted as exceptional, but appeared unannounced within the regular flow of prime-time television. I did not search out these episodes, at least not initially, but as they increasingly appeared in my regular viewing I started to check episode guides of series I thought likely to have accommodated the dominant themes and intentionally sought out the last few shows that had *not* been part of my regular viewing routine. I mention this because it serves as such a spontaneous illustration of the cultural forum model at its most precise. These multiple and contradictory narratives emerged in an unintentional and unorganized manner. The preponderance of various themes appeared because of an eruption of cultural sentiment rather than a planned agenda, with media outlets not leading so much as responding to broader cultural events and attitudes that were unspoken or between the lines of news coverage and personal conversations. The episodes are exceptionally varied in their narrative strategies, contexts, ideological positions and emphases, although a few distinctive motifs emerge. The result was a far more vibrant discussion and exploration of post-9/11 fears, policies and uncertainties than transpired in nonfictional television content.

Negotiations in police procedural narratives

The District, *Law & Order*, *NYPD Blue*, *Third Watch* and *The Division* are all, at least in part, police procedural franchises that devoted either episodes or an episodic plotline to a motif related to post-9/11 events. In most cases these stories dealt with issues related to stereotyping, which often emerged as an element of police profiling procedures or in the selection of a victim. I will address only an episode of two different series in substantial depth here, but these narratives must be understood as part of a broader set of stories and series. Instead, I could have chosen to focus on the post-9/11 stories told through the courtrooms of *Family Law*, *The Practice*, *Law & Order* and a court-style debate in *Boston Public*; addressed the narratives emerging from a classroom setting in *The Education of Max Bickford*, *Boston Public* and *The West Wing*; or considered how the events were explicitly negotiated within familial contexts in *7th Heaven* and *American Family*. The wide-ranging approach I am arguing for could only be accomplished by considering all of these series' narratives, which remains a future task. Focusing on the stories emerging in just one type of series serves to illustrate my point and suggests the need for inclusive examinations when rooting work in a cultural forum foundation.

The episode of *The District* titled 'Twist of Hate' (CBS, tx 26 January 2002) is arguably the most comprehensive of the police

procedural narratives, but the density of interrelated stories also makes it somewhat incomprehensible. The episode opens with the police investigating vandalism at a mosque, a crime that is followed the next night with the murder of a rabbi, and then the beating of a black man.[26] Throughout their investigation, various detectives speak from positions of ethnic bias, publicly negotiating many of the racist assumptions circulating in post-9/11 US society. The police investigation reveals that the attacks on the rabbi and the black man were the work of a single member of a hate group, who admits killing 'the Jew' and the 'black' to make it look like the 'towel heads' had done it. The police chief ultimately discovers that the mosque vandalism was the work of the mosque's president, Omar Khalid, who sought to gain popular sympathy and more police protection. His actions have personal consequences, however, as his daughter gets caught in a violent frenzy resulting from protests outside the mosque and ends up in hospital.

The script is loaded with rapid-fire rhetoric among feuding ethnic groups and far more direct statements of prejudice than are common in public discourse.[27] Bald statements of bias ('I am not a racist, I am a realist'; 'If a Christian bombs an abortion clinic then all Christians are fanatics'; 'Christians aren't why police are out guarding airports, dams, and bridges') are never interrogated, but rather unintelligibly accumulate amidst secondary plots. One subplot also initially suggests a hate crime against the police chief's black assistant, which is later revealed as a non-racially motivated boys' prank. Adding to the density of hate crime discourse, two detectives discuss their assessments of the racial situation throughout the episode: Debreno (a white detective) suggests that Page (a black detective) exhibits racist behaviour towards Arab–Americans. The episode reveals the root of this ethnic distrust to be an event Page witnessed while serving in Operation Desert Storm: a sixteen-year-old Saudi Arabian girl killed by her father to restore honour to her family after she was caught running away with a married man.

This complex episode includes too many contradictory perspectives to make much sense, particularly as the narrative moves too fast to allow viewers time to reconsider their initial assumptions after learning that Khalid was responsible for the mosque bombing. The episode overdetermines its connection to the post-9/11 world by including a multitude of signifiers in the central plotline as well as the subplots – notably a storyline about auditions to fill an empty position on the police choir, which provides narrative justification for the episode to conclude with a large a cappella men's choir (in uniform) singing 'Impossible Dream' in front of an enormous American flag. Although appearing to be a part of the post-9/11 dramatic negotiations, 'Twist of Hate' ultimately proves to be a different sort of show than others that use their narrative to comment on resulting cultural changes. Where most of the other dramatic episodes engaging post-9/11 discourse do so with a voice that clearly seeks to advance a perspective or encourage

26 Curiously, *The Division* episode 'Before the Deluge' (Lifetime, tx 7 August 2002) begins similarly. The officers respond to the shooting of an Arab–American shopowner, which is immediately followed by the murder of female rabbi in a temple in the same neighbourhood. *The Division* episode then shifts into a hate crime narrative with a member of multiple white supremacist groups ultimately implicated in the crimes. This story is no more about hatred against Arab–Americans than any other group, but its initial similarity in plot and inclusion of an Arab–American victim make it a significant note in assessing the broader debate enacted within the televisual cultural forum.

27 Leaders of the Muslim, Jewish, and religious black communities squabble throughout the episode because they feel the group they represent is being underserved by the police.

consideration of the resulting environment of fear, *The District* episode uses the 9/11 motif more as a plot catalyst with an uncertain or at least ambivalent sentiment. Nevertheless, its use of so many relevant signifiers makes it pertinent and marks it as part of the cultural negotiation.

The multiple plots and subplots, bombastic rhetoric, and the complicated prospect of who was to blame makes it difficult to discern a clear ideological agenda. In one sense the story argues for the importance of peace among subordinated groups (as opposed to killing each other off to the benefit of white extremists), but the revelation of Khalid's complicity at the end of the episode undercuts much of the previous narrative, suggesting the episode sought to offer an anti-Arab–American sentiment along the lines of 'they are bringing this on themselves'. Yet, assessing the entire episode, including initial sympathy with the Arab–American characters, makes such a reading tenuous. The abrupt conclusion perhaps allows the true ramification of this new information to pass without much consideration; but at some level Khalid's actions are to blame for the rabbi's death, the black man's beating, and for creating the level of tension that led to his daughter's assault. Ultimately, I suspect most viewers were left with a sense of confusion from the repeated narrative contradictions.

Importantly, a full episode need not be devoted to post-9/11 themes for complex storytelling to take place. The earliest police procedural narrative to air was a secondary story in the *NYPD Blue* episode 'Baby Love' (ABC, tx 4 December 2001), in which detectives Medavoy and Jones are called to the scene of an arson attack at a television store owned by two Arab–American brothers. The story follows the detectives' search for the arsonist and conflict with the storeowners who believe the detectives' initial lack of success results from a half-hearted effort because the victims are Arab–American.

This episode also negotiates contemporary tensions by giving public voice to racist statements, but in a manner of critique not advance. When the detectives interrogate the suspect they sympathize with him, suggesting they too believe that 'those people don't belong here anymore' in order to lead him to implicate himself. In the last relevant scene of the episode, Jones discusses his discomfort with using racist rhetoric to motivate the suspect's confession with girlfriend A.D.A. Haywood.[28] She reassures him by saying, 'You're not racist, you're human. There's what goes through your head and what shows in your actions. That's the difference', to which Jones responds, 'Yeah, well I don't like it going through my head, period. It sure as hell wasn't there before September 11th.'

The episode also includes a thought-provoking scene in which the son of one of the storeowners visits the squad room to apologize for his father's and uncle's distrust of the police and accusations of police racism. Medavoy returns the apology and the boy then asks the precinct room in general, 'What can we do, 'cos my family has lived here for

28 It may be relevant for non-viewers to know that Haywood and Jones are African–American.

thirty years. I was born here. We're Americans.' Although the question appears rhetorical, Sipowicz responds by noting, 'There were times in this country when it wasn't a big plus to be Japanese or German', and Jones adds, 'or black'. The scene concludes with Sipowicz offering the somewhat empty solution that, 'It'll pass. Hang in there.'

Despite the less central status of this plotline in the overall narrative of the episode, and the comparative avoidance of symbolic language and rhetoric, this episode provides an examination with considerable emotional depth. Rather than the more theoretical debate of due process erosion that emerges from *The District*'s initial suspicion of an Arab–American in the rabbi's beating, the plotline emphasizes personal struggles and stories. The Arab–American families are highly sympathetic in their plight of being considered American one day and the target of suspicion and hate the next. Sipowicz's advice of 'hang in there' seems empty, but it is the most truthful suggestion that could be offered given the historical context. The decision to include the discussion between Jones and Haywood is significant, as it is entirely superfluous to the narrative and provides a very personalized reaction to the character's internal struggle with the overnight birth of an ethnicity-based stereotype. Haywood's separation of what is thought and what is done as different components of racism is provocative, and accessible to audience members who also may be struggling with the thoughts Jones acknowledges.

In describing *NYPD Blue*'s treatment as emphasizing personal struggles and stories, I do not mean to perpetuate a hierarchical valuation in which stories that produce institutional solutions are more progressive than stories offering solutions at the individual level.[29] The contribution of the *NYPD Blue* episode and many of the other narratives results from their ability to give a face to the consequences of abstract policy issues. For example, both *The Practice* and *Family Law* create exceptionally similar episodes dealing with the detainment of Arab–American men on vague and tenuous grounds (other than their ethnic identity). The humanity with which the series construct the characters' suffering from due process erosion indicates how people are affected by policy dictums coded in political rhetoric and delivered by government officials. Updates about new governmental policies may seem 'natural' and 'commonsense' when delivered as decontextualized news items, but posing narratives which encourage audience identification with the victims enables a different kind of understanding.[30]

Other series with police procedural components also incorporated 9/11 themes. *Third Watch* constructed companion episodes, the first set on September 10th so that it concludes with the beginning of the Twin Tower disaster ('September 11th', NBC, tx 22 November 2001). The subsequent episode, set ten days later on September 21st, depicts the officers exhausted from twelve-hour shifts and somewhat dumbstruck by the support and respect afforded by the people of New York ('After

29 See for example, Todd Gitlin, 'Prime time ideology: the hegemonic process in television entertainment', in Newcomb (ed.), *Television: the Critical View*, pp. 516–36.

30 Admittedly, narratives also could be constructed to support policies such as due process erosion, but significantly, this has not been the case.

Time', NBC, tx 29 November 2001). This normally action-driven show focuses on more personal stories in this episode, with plot time spent following officers through their interactions with each other and family, emphasizing their conversations about their fears and reevaluations of their careers.

Law & Order too has incorporated post-9/11 themes into various episodes, although the series tends to focus on these issues more in the courtroom drama than the initial police procedural part of the story. In cases when 9/11 themes emerged in the detective work of Briscoe and Green, it often resulted from discussions about the racial profiling of suspects. As in the episode of *The District*, in 'Patriot' (NBC, tx 22 May 2002), the detectives investigate the murder of an Arab–American man and find themselves with evidence now considered suspicious because of the man's ethnic identity. Specifically, they find him to have much more money than they would suspect reasonable for his salary as a mechanic, and they struggle with suspicions that he might be a 'sleeper' agent of a terrorist group. Briscoe (a white detective) expresses ethnic prejudice, which leads Green (a black detective) to remind him that such thinking is what leads officers to pull over Green when he is not driving a police vehicle. The detectives continue the conversation about the 'dirty little secret' of police work (racial profiling) with their lieutenant. Racial profiling-themed stories had appeared frequently in police procedural narratives prior to 9/11, but the new context of Arab–Americans as the primary victims of this practice allowed a reworking of these stories with bias assumptions and stereotypes that had been previously articulated in relation to discrimination against African–Americans.

Across all of the 9/11-themed narratives (not just those set in police procedural stories), motifs about privacy erosion, stereotyping, social tolerance, racial profiling, due process violations, the changed social reality and options for activism recur with varying frequency. Research focused on textual analysis of one of these motifs or the discourse produced in a certain type of series would most likely indicate common themes and discrepant foci. In the police procedural narratives considered here, stories with themes related to racial profiling and stereotypes are the most common, although it is important to note the differences and similarities through which writers deploy these stories. The primary argument I seek to make with this example is the importance of casting a broad enough net when selecting texts and making arguments about content. Had I only considered *The District*'s episode as representative of 'television's' treatment of post 9/11 discourse, I could have made assumptions really only true of an isolated series and episode.[31]

31 Had her argument been different, Isabelle Freda's consideration of an episode of *The West Wing* dealing with post-9/11 discourse would have suffered from such assumptions. Isabelle Freda, '*Survivors* in *The West Wing*: 9/11 and the United States of emergency', in Wheeler Winston Dixon (ed.), *Film and Television After 9/11* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), pp. 226–46.

Conclusion

The fraction of 9/11-themed shows considered here begins to suggest the various ways this event and its cultural consequences have been transmitted, negotiated and shared. Again, I emphasize that this example only includes one set of narratives, and a larger project incorporating legal, family and school-based dramas would indicate a far broader range of stories. The police procedural example is illustrative not only of multiplicity and subtle variation, but also in terms of accumulation. Indeed, this example takes textual negotiation beyond that which occurs in a single text to an ongoing experience of new narratives that might lead viewers to reconsider previous opinions and views. Audience members might make sense of the first 9/11 narrative they view in relation to personal beliefs and news media information, but the second episode then converses with the first, and so on.[32]

32 Newcomb, 'On the dialogic aspects', pp. 44–9.

It is not likely that audiences see all of the variations provided by multiple series' treatments of a specific issue. With viewing distributed across a broad range of channel options, it is difficult to speculate about how many or even which types of shows a single audience member is likely to encounter and in what order. My viewing of narrative fiction may be much broader than most audience members, since I watch shows I enjoy as well as a great many that I might not view if my vocation were different. I happened to see *The District* episode as a rerun, which aired the day before *The Division* episode (see fn. 26). The two narratives (which are initially very similar) consequently merged, or seemed in conversation with each other, to a degree unlikely had I seen *The District* episode during its original airing seven months earlier; nor would the scenario have been so impressive if I had only seen one of the episodes.

As the transition to a post-network era initiates a shift towards multiple plays of episodes through practices such as original-run repurposing and technologies such as digital video recorders and video on demand, which decrease live viewing, it becomes impossible to estimate when and in what order audiences view specific content, even of the most popular shows. Much valuable audience research might investigate these questions and empirically study whether and how audiences negotiate the ideas in multiple series' material. The cultural forum model was able to assume a much less complicated process of circulation when constructing its textual analyses in the network era.

The example of 9/11 narratives offers a particularly politically-loaded context, but it is necessary to acknowledge that cross-text exploration of ideas also occurs for less mainstream and ideologically significant stories. For example, in earlier thinking on this topic I noticed that many of the medical shows that I watch, specifically *ER*, *Strong Medicine* and *Providence*, offered episodes exploring Munchhausen Syndrome by Proxy. A similar cross-text analysis might

be done for episodes on racial profiling in police procedural narratives or other 'ripped from the headlines' stories that different programmes incorporate. Although the example I use here is quite exceptional in its centrality to material political and ideological concerns, this approach is useful across a broad range of topics and discourses.

The assertions of the cultural forum model remain effective for considering programming during this transition to a post-network era, particularly when it is used with recognition of how the television industry and the experience of being a television viewer have changed and how these adjustments continue. The dynamic nature of contemporary institutional processes requires constant reassessment of the foundational theories and assumptions that underpin critical media work. The argument and analysis presented here examines only one of many foundational theoretical perspectives; it is likely that reconsidering others might also prove useful, while others might easily adapt to different institutional contexts.

Most scholarship employing the cultural forum emphasizes its allowance for the presence of contradictory or varying content with a suggestion that this diversity of ideas provides a space for negotiation. Characteristics of the post-network era require that critics de-emphasize the model's theorization of television's scope, but instead accentuate the multiplicity of series and content it makes available. The process of content dissemination becomes more relevant in the post-network era, while the deliberate selection of units of analysis becomes crucial to producing valid scholarship. In some ways, the post-network multiplicity of television content enhances the relevance of the cultural forum model, because the multiplicity of channels expands the 'forum' in significant ways. Admittedly, the technology should not be viewed as determinant, but we can look to research on audiences to confirm that audiences do engage a broader range of channels than the network-era three. Similarly, viewing schedules provide evidence of the greater variety of forms and content available, despite increasingly centralized ownership and various repurposing strategies. In some situations the model still operates effectively. Networks targeting specific sub-populations still operate in the tradition of the forum, although only among a particular and homogeneous population, as in the case of Nickelodeon among children and MTV among teens.

Other aspects of the forum model diminish in their importance in this new context. As suggested here, scope must be carefully attended to in determining units of analysis, and although the viewing strip remains a useful theoretical concept, actually exploring the viewing sequence of a particular viewer tells us little about the larger television phenomenon, because these strips have become so individualized with the multiplicity of options available (although, as Newcomb notes, some eighty-one possibilities were available on a given night even in the network era).[33] Relatedly, the changes of the post-network era alter the position of television in what Bernard Miege theorized as three logics

33 Newcomb, 'One night', p. 91.

underlying the production of culture and information.[34] In the late 1980s context of his writing, Miege could argue that television fitted into a 'flow model', which is characteristic of media manifesting continuity, a range of diffusion, and ephemerality. Contemporary US television is increasingly representative of an alternative model – what Miege identifies as a 'publishing model'. Industries operating under the logic of the publishing model typically feature a great uncertainty in product success and respond to this uncertainty by producing a large catalogue of texts to disperse risk and by segmenting audiences with content tailored to specific tastes. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, US television is best understood as demonstrating attributes that blend the flow and publishing models. The shift in the application of Miege's models illustrates another example of how theoretical models must be refined and reconceptualized as the object of study evolves.

The adjustments in theories the post-network era requires of frameworks such as the cultural forum or Miege's models indicate the limitations and, ultimately, the inadequacy of adopting grand, macro-level theoretical frameworks to explain the relationships between commercial cultural industries and the ideological content of their textual products. The intricate variations of these industries are far too complex; the dynamic nature of their organizational logic prevents theories about their operation that assume that they 'always' or 'never' do anything, however elegant, from attending to the variations of their practice.

As an object of study, US television has changed considerably since the creation of many of the foundational theories through which it is commonly understood. Just as the frameworks of analysis have varied in response to shifts in assumptions about the operation of media in society, they must adjust in response to significant developments and alterations in the media themselves. By the mid 1990s, the US television industry had removed itself from the industrial logic that had governed it since its creation. Its evolution into a new emergent logic may not be complete, but the development is significant enough that residual frameworks for understanding the medium require updating and revision. Network-era models and frameworks will not necessarily become obsolete, but the validity of the assumptions upon which they were built will require reconsideration.

34 Bernard Miege, *The Capitalization of Cultural Production* (New York, NY: Information General, 1989).

Nicky Hamlyn, *Film Art Phenomena*. London: British Film Institute, 2003, 200 pp.

Nina Danino and Michael Mazière (eds), *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists' Film and Video*. London: Wallflower Press, 2002, 292 pp.

Wheeler Winston Dixon and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster (eds), *Experimental Cinema: the Film Reader* (In Focus: Routledge Film Readers Series). New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2002, 356 pp.

A.L. REES

Experimental film and video is a small world, so I had better say at once that Nicky Hamlyn thanks me in his introduction for encouraging him to write the book that now appears as *Film Art Phenomena*. Both of us were also on the collective editorial board of *Undercut* for over half its lifetime of nineteen issues in the 1980s, now anthologized by Michael Mazière and Nina Danino in a generous and well-designed selection. The common link is the London Film Makers' Co-operative, founded in 1966 to promote and make experimental or 'underground' films on the principles of direct democracy and self-help production. By the 1970s the Co-op had generated the UK structural film, premissed on a 'hands-on', process-based aesthetic, with its own film printing and editing workshop. This idea still feeds into Hamlyn's book, as it did into *Undercut*, founded in 1981 at the Co-op by a group of filmmakers and writers at the end of the structural era.

Structural film – and the inspiration of Ron Haseldon, Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal – led young artists like Hamlyn, who was then an art student at Reading University, to give up painting and turn to new media. He showed a two-screen film at the ICA's Festival of Expanded Cinema in 1976, which opened on his twenty-second birthday. Like many of his generation, he was an art student when

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'muscular post-painterly abstraction, performance and installation jostled together'. More than that, he says, 'in the decade when I was a student, art was frequently discussed in relation to politics, and the politics of form became an important and central issue in those debates' (p. vii). This project is also central to his book, now updated to the age of digital media and new gallery art.

Whether experimental film and video is best defined as an art form like painting or sculpture, or as an aspect of a wider cinema that includes narrative and documentary, or as a hybrid between the two, is a key question for the books under review. As his title suggests, Hamlyn's focus is on art. He takes three main categories, Media, Apparatus and Aesthetics, and subdivides each into four or five chapters. Media has the widest scope, to explore the differences between film, video, digital media and the 'expanding technologies' of multi-screen installation. In Apparatus he looks at precise aspects of these larger processes, including the frame, camera-movement and point-of-view. Finally, Aesthetics takes up the question of placement: space, location, interaction, sound, performance. The question of audience is examined in each section, while a conclusion spells out the implications for an engaged politics of viewing.

Firmly structural but also generous in scope, *Film Art Phenomena* fleshes out its categories by examples rather than edicts. An attractive feature of the book is its vivid descriptions of films, videos and installations that emphasize and scrutinize the act of their own making, and throw new light on subject matter from landscape to city life. Recognizing differences, especially as digital media replace analogue film and tape, Hamlyn also shows the links between them. His opening chapter looks at works not coincidentally made for television by veterans David Hall and David Larcher, to show how they deploy image-decay or distortion to challenge codes of transparent meaning or realism. Similarly, younger artists like Simon Payne and Jennifer Nightingale cannily evoke the shapes and patterns of abstract film to question the source of their representational images, the one by sophisticated rescanning of video signals and the other by such seemingly primitive means as the pinhole lens or hand-cranked camera.

Hamlyn looks at many films that enjoy relatively wide circulation in the limited circles of artists' film distribution, such as those by Michael Snow, Gidal, John Smith, Le Grice and Stan Brakhage. Luckily, there is a revival of interest in screening the classic avant garde, from festivals to DVDs and repertory programmes at Tate Britain, so that readers can view some of these for themselves. Others will perhaps never be seen outside the context of this book, since Hamlyn includes some innovative and exciting, but ephemeral, works made in art schools today. As a student Hamlyn himself shot hand-held films while wearing rollerskates, and the playful-but-serious impulse to expand the art of vision seems not to have waned among students thirty years later. They tie cameras (and their operators) to wheels, make cameras

bungee-jump, fire off 50 super-8 projectors at once (loaded with blank film or coloured leader) or set a line of video cameras on time-delay to record spectators apparently a step ahead of themselves as they walk past the monitor screens. Larger scale routes to non-narrative meaning include the four-screen *After Manet* by Le Grice, where the same scene is shot from the point-of view of four participants, the 'expanded' cameras invented by Steve Farrer and Snow, or the paradoxically looped and inverted images in films by Guy Sherwin.

The criteria for inclusion and analysis have less to do with historical place and precedence (let alone a pantheon) than with relevance to the theme – tactics of making films which are authored, located and investigative, to make films that ask questions, in David Hall's phrase, rather than tell stories. Hamlyn's cool explanatory style only turns sharp when he laments the rise of glib and fashion-driven gallery projection art, or art that uncritically celebrates cinematic glamour. He defends and prefers a 'critical cinema' in which the viewer participates in the process of meaning, and does not just receive generalized messages and coded assumptions, whether they come from the art gallery or the mass media. The apparatus, or the film machine (and its post-film electronic cognates), is the key to this understanding. Freed of the predetermined grammar of narrative cinema, the machine and its recording properties can reshape perception of time and motion.

The 'politics of perception', and the micro-systems that underpin cinematic illusionism, are explored in Hamlyn's own luminous films, which typically generate apparent motion from clusters of single static frames. His book also trawls the wider shores of the movement and time image, to find complex figural moments in Antonioni and Godard. The social imperative surfaces at the end, with an account of the recent *Non Places* by Karen Mirza and Brad Butler, in which blank sites and walkways are accompanied by subtitled and disjointed personal stories – drawn from public questionnaires – of loss, violence and memory in city life. The critique of representation, as the book makes clear, includes a documentary dimension.

Film Art Phenomena is exceptionally well designed, with most of its frame stills made specifically for the book and with a generous colour section – a bonus, given the rarity of some of works discussed. Hamlyn writes from deep inside his subject, as a filmmaker, but the book can be as easily read by non-experts as by budding film and video artists. Its exceptionally lucid prose and clear positioning will appeal to all readers looking for light in the currently dense thickets of argument about the aesthetics, methods and ontologies of film and digital media.

Some of Hamlyn's early essays are found in *The Undercut Reader*, 'the only UK journal dedicated to artists' film between 1980 and 1990' (p. ix). It ran to a healthy nineteen issues – although some of these were doubles – and was collectively edited up until 1986, with the final three issues edited by Danino and Mazière, the compilers of this handsome and remarkable selection. Like the Co-op itself, it was an

artist-led venture. *Undercut* was formed by film activists dissatisfied with the academic and narrative-drama focus of *Screen*, but equally with the anti-narrative dogma of structural film.

Even so, *Screen* by this time was making more room for art (under the editorship of Mark Nash), and the structuralists themselves were turning to more narrative and social concerns, as the interviews with William Raban and Chris Welsby show. Le Grice was writing on these themes, and Lis Rhodes had staged her own rebellion and was making explicitly feminist films. Only Gidal stayed seemingly intransigent, but like the others named here he was a strong and encouraging presence for the new wave. He figures prominently with early texts on Warhol (issue 1) and UK film (issue 2), but as late as 1988 (issue 17) he is found arguing his anti-representational case against the then new tendency to make films about 'cultural identity'. So if this was a generational revolt, it turned out that the parents (and teachers) of the Co-op rebels were at least arguing in the same political arena, even if with a distinct political agenda.

The common enemy was the rise of pop culture, including rock-and opera-saturated New Romantics (partly inspired by Derek Jarman) and Scratch Video makers, all dubbed as 'the new subjectivism'. *Undercut* did not see these phenomena as resistant to Thatcher's Britain (then really hitting its stride) but as compliant with it. Not until the end of its run did these polarities start to break down, with a wave of writers like Nik Houghton, Jez Welsh and Sean Cubitt making room for a more open – but still critical – view of events in the wider culture. In 1984 (issue 10/11) Michael O'Pray still had to 'smuggle in' the New Romantics like John Maybury, Sophie Muller and Cerith Wyn Evans, as he comments in a new introduction to his trenchant overview of mid-80s UK film and video, aptly called 'Life in the Trenches'. But the writing was on the wall. By 1988 (issue 17) Angela McRobbie was asking 'can popular culture also be avant-garde?', and Steve Hawley was presciently looking ahead to the digital age.

So while Mazière says that *Undercut* was 'framed by the closure of the structuralist period and the beginnings of the Young British Artists' – which is puzzling in that the YBAs did not take off until the mid 1990s – it was clearly a volatile and complex period. Appeals to postmodernism (casting structuralists as high moderns) will not do, since Stuart Hood and Noël Burch greet the new *Undercut* era, somewhat grumpily, as postmodernist in issue 1, while Isaac Julien is still calling for a postmodernist revolution in issue 17, seven years later. Five new introductions to the Reader try to fix the context. These include O'Pray's useful recollections of the early days and Julia Knight's reflections on the marginalization of video art, regarded with some suspicion by the Co-op filmmakers and their associates in the Workshop movement. But anyone who does not know what the Workshop movement was, or is justifiably unaware of the heated debates about the politics of Channel 4 when it was founded, will not

pick up all the clues from the Reader itself, where these long-ago battles are assumed rather than explained.

More familiar and even contemporary is a nagging, if not always productive, question about avant-garde film: is it fine art or a different kind of cinema? *Undercut* was concerned that to cast experimental film as primarily 'anti-narrative', in the Gidalian sense, was to mistakenly accede too much power to the mainstream, with the avant garde defined in (negative) relation to it. This seems odd in one way, because all Gidal's reference points were to art rather than to cinema, going back to his time as an art and art history student and his friendship with Warhol at the Factory in New York. But the point was to open up room for more allusive and content-based films than strict structuralism seemed to permit, as Danino argues in her introduction. Her own imperative, for example, was for film that directly addressed the gender of the filmmaker and the viewer, and included the speaking voice, which she believes to be outside a formalist schema. In the event, *Undercut* was to be an important outlet for new work by women artists who were breaking old moulds, with impressively early articles on Sally Potter, Jayne Parker, Mona Hatoum and Sandra Lahire.

Like the old Baptist Church in Covent Garden, *Undercut* tended to be 'Strict and Particular': no names of authors on the front cover for fear of creating hierachies, even when it might have improved sales; no cover pictures for most of its life, in an iconoclastic gesture against the cult of the image; and, after a brief spell, no Biff cartoons, although Mick Kidd and Chris Garratt were LFMC members (the Reader happily reprints a spoof ad for Arts Council Film Grants, promising that 'credit will be given to applicants who foreground the signifier'). The relation to the Co-op itself was also wary, with a masthead proclaiming *Undercut* 'the magazine from [that is, not 'of'] the LFMC'. It was a time when to speak for others was a big and contestable claim.

Despite all its faults, *Undercut* was a serious and austere voice for a decade when the borderlines of art and cinema were at their most fluid, and in which committed film art was at its most marginal. It was a platform for theorized debate when art was becoming too highly commercialised for those unwilling to take a populist stance. It encouraged new writers, Patrick Keiller and David Rodowick among them, but also attracted generous support from leading visual artists like Peter Kennard, John Hilliard and Richard Long (the last two for the outstanding 'Landscape' double-issue 7/8, with an image on the cover for once). The Reader contains many of the original photo-essays or collages by Annabel Nicolson, Rob Gawthrop and Joanna Millett, Jean Matthee, Claire Barwell, Nick Collins and others. They evidently stem from the first wave of UK 'conceptual art' of the 1970s, a link now obvious but not much noted at the time. Despite its medium-specific reputation, and its antagonism to the 'new spirit' culture of its time, *Undercut* featured time-based art in all its forms, including installation.

Elegantly designed and printed, much improving the original grainy photos, and marred only by some bad typos (especially of names), the Reader is a good overview. The selection necessarily reflects the interests of the editors, and anyone who knows the complete run will have some regrets. By focusing only on UK artists, a good thing in itself, the Reader makes *Undercut* seem less internationalist than it was. For example, the Polish avant garde received much attention, as did the French, while the Straub/Huillet interview with Ben Brewster in issue 7/8 is a loss. The whole of the 'Cultural Identities' issue 17 is reprinted, which seems excessive, while there is no mention of the equally important transcribed debate in issue 9 between Edgar Anstey, Ivor Montagu, Stuart Hood and Claire Johnston on the 'Grierson Legacy', presumably the last public discussion with some of the founders of UK documentary.

One important caveat, however, for the reader: the essays are organized by topics and issues, cutting across chronology and issue numbers, which is fine except that none of them are dated. This means that you have to keep looking at the issue-by-issue list of contents, at the back of the book, to find out when they were written. It also leads to curious anomalies. The discussion between Hood and Burch is located 150 pages away from the Le Grice article related to its themes, although both appeared in issue 1, 1981. In an unfortunate flashback to the bad old days, all the video articles are clustered at the end in an out-of-sequence order. But this does not undermine the importance of the book as long as the reader keeps a wary eye on the date-lines, and is prepared to interact with the text rather than to be spoon-fed.

Experimental Cinema: the Film Reader suffers from a similar problem of order and sequence, but even worse since it covers such a long timespan, from 1919 to the present day. Dixon himself is an astute and assiduous analyst of the avant garde, among other cinemas, and in *The Exploding Eye* (1997) he unearthed many US artists outside the 'canon', but this Reader is canonical throughout. A breathless introduction looks at the whole period from the 1920s to the present, never pausing to ask questions or pose problems or seek antagonisms between the different waves of experimental film activity. Similarly, chapters from published and easily available books are placed alongside rarely reprinted journal articles, with no date of publication (there is a separate list of printed sources to consult). To take one example, this means that J-C. Horak's intricate and scholarly account of 1920s filmmakers, from his 1996 book *Lovers of Cinema*, is followed by Mekas's famously spontaneous rave on the underground film, from a *Film Culture* issue of 1962. Can this be history? Likewise, Sitney's original article on structural film is printed from a 1969 journal, with no reference to the different and more widely circulated version in his book *Visionary Film* (1974 and 1979, now itself revised and back in print). The lack of dates and sparse section-notes may lead the reader to think that Hollis Frampton and Warren Sonbert,

interviewed in the book, are still alive, which sadly they are not (Brakhage's death in 2003 came after publication).

There are still gems in such a lively collection, however it is organized. Brakhage and Carolee Schneeman look back at their early work somewhat critically, the first for manipulating or mythologizing his own family in his classic domestic diary-films, the second by discussing her 1967 film of (hetero)sexual liberation, *Fuses*, in the context of later feminisms when violence against women became a key issue. Gidal's interview with Frampton is a rare find, both its previous incarnations being out of print, but he is the only UK filmmaker even mentioned, apart from Julien.

The mixture of informal and critical essays might have sparkled, but here they do not. A laboured reading of Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* as part of the sociology of the bike cult misses its core thematic and visual power, and many of the contributions are stronger on issues than ideas. There is no clear rationale for inclusion or exclusion – why Snow rather than Gehr? – although the Reader's brave aim, one senses, is to remind audiences for radical gay and black film (featured in the last section of the book) that an alternative cinema is rooted in the avant-garde aspiration, and to recall more widely that social critique has always been part of the avant garde's history.

Philip Gillett, *The British Working Class in Postwar Film*. New York, NY and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 230 pp.

Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: the Decline of Deference*. New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 409 pp.

ROBERT MURPHY

It is useful to have Philip Gillett's PhD thesis on the representation of the British working class in book form. MUP has packaged it more attractively than its British Filmmakers series, though fails to point out that it deals only with the five-year period 1945–50. One can see the need for a sociological schema, detailed box-office returns and a concentrated time-span for a convincing PhD thesis, but in turning it into a book Gillett might have been better advised to change his parameters. The box-office information is often unrevealing, the rehearsals of sociological arguments routine, and the timeframe unproductively arbitrary. The end of the war and the election of a Labour government in 1945 might be a convenient watershed, but it is not particularly relevant to the way in which working-class characters were represented in British films. Gillett does not allow himself even a backwards glance at films from the early 1940s like *Love on the Dole*, *Millions Like Us* and *The Way Ahead*, which marked a real shift in the way working-class characters were presented. Instead he begins with a detailed analysis of *The Way to the Stars*, a film which – as one might expect from director Anthony Asquith and writer Terence Rattigan – shows little interest in class relations or working-class characters.

It is not until chapter four, in which Gillett analyzes films dealing with working-class communities, that he really gets into his subject. In his perceptive analyses of *It Always Rains on Sunday*, *London Belongs to Me*, *The Blue Lamp* and *Holiday Camp* he elucidates the significance

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of parlours, kitchens and unheated bedrooms, bathtubs and Anderson shelters, pubs, doss houses and Sunday street markets, and provides fascinating detail on dress codes and hair styles. The same high quality of original analysis continues in the following chapter on 'portrayals of the working-class family', in which he looks at *Waterloo Road*, *Waterfront*, and the three much-derided Hugget films that were spun off from *Holiday Camp*. Gillett's detailed descriptions of the interiors constructed for these films might have benefited from some mention of the art director's role, but they are nonetheless evocatively revealing.

Later chapters on spivs and juvenile delinquents are much less clearly focused. The dangerous attractions and illusory rewards offered by a life of crime – both for middle-class war veterans and for working-class characters trapped by their grim environment – figure prominently in a number of postwar films. But Gillett does not exploit the opportunity to discuss them, with key films like *Temptation Harbour*, *Black Memory*, *Night Beat* and *Noose* ignored completely. A discursive analysis of *Brighton Rock* concludes weakly that the film deserves praise for 'bringing to the screen a working-class character in all his psychological complexity, however malign.' (p. 110). *They Made Me a Fugitive*, which Gillett sees, perversely, as a black comedy, is unconvincingly summarized as 'an entertainment in which the middle-class characters – Clem, Sally and Inspector Rockliffe – triumph at the expense of the criminal and the working class' (p. 113). The discussion of juvenile delinquents meanders beyond 1950 to include *Cosh Boy* and *Scum*, but ignores Jack Lee's far more relevant dramatized documentary *Children on Trial* (1946).

Fortunately the book concludes with useful chapters on the dance hall and the crucial role of children in these immediate postwar films. This is a book that is frequently original and written with genuine insight into its subject. I noticed few actual mistakes (George Carney, not Robert Newton plays the brutal Mr Rawlings in *Good Time Girl*) but there are too many omissions. Duncan Petrie's *Screening Scotland* should be in the bibliography; but it is the erratic choice of films and the loss of focus on his thematic concerns that prevents Gillett's enjoyable book from becoming a definitive study.

As one might expect from two well-established scholars Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s* is more thorough and substantial. One can quibble about why there is nothing on the Danziger brothers, or Raymond Stross or Julian Wintle, but this is the first comprehensive history of British cinema of the 1950s and it is an immensely knowledgeable and enjoyable one. Harper and Porter cast a fresh eye on the goings-on at Pinewood, Shepperton, Elstree and Ealing, but they also introduce us to a new *dramatis personae* in the form of government minions busily meddling in the affairs of the industry, and enterprising independent producers adept at grasping opportunities in this decade of rapid change.

Porter and Harper complement each other and it is not always

possible to identify who wrote which bits. The introduction and conclusion were probably jointly written, but I was baffled by the neutral chapter on cinemagoing. As a rough guide, Porter tends to be cautious about value judgements, likes using the word 'eponymous', and is much concerned with 'structures of feeling'. Harper is more flamboyant but also more erratic. She thinks in terms of 'topoi', admires people who are 'canny' and invites us to 'consider' a wide range of facts, opinions and theories. She is determinedly undeferential to received opinion. Respected figures like Sir Michael Balcon are given a sound ticking off for their failure to move with the times, and obscurely respectable bodies like Group 3 have whatever stuffing they ever had mercilessly thrashed out of them. Laurence Olivier should never have been allowed to 'warble' his own songs in *The Beggar's Opera* (p. 157); Errol Flynn's 'favourite co-star was Three Star Hennessey' (p. 156); and Muriel Box, despite her 'lively inventiveness' was afflicted by 'an uncompromising sexual radicalism, which pleased her but not the distributors or audiences' (p. 162).

It is instructive to disentangle their individual contributions to the chapters on American–British production and on independent producers. It has to be Harper who writes about Richard Thorpe's 'lacklustre approach' and the 'vulval symbolism' of Elizabeth Haffenden's MGM costume films; and Warner Bros is firmly staked out as Porter territory. Other sections are less clear-cut. Herbert Wilcox 'embraced traditional structures of feeling' but the fact that he imposed 'inert' production values on *Odette* and was responsible for the 'lacklustre *The Heart of a Man*' marks him as one of Harper's victims; similarly with George Minter, who produced *Our Girl Friday*, 'lacklustre' despite the performance of Joan Collins wearing 'a basque with an autonomous life of its own' (p. 164). Ivan Foxwell, although he was responsible for the 'twee and slow-moving *24 Hours of a Woman's Life*', also produced *The Intruder* – described here as 'an eclectic mix of psychological concern and physical rigour' (p. 168) but condemned earlier for its 'lacklustre structure' (p. 100); Daniel Angel nurtured the 'gentle talent' of Philip Leacock, a director given short shrift by Harper – both are probably attributable to Porter.

Porter is at his best when dealing with diligently researched new material. The first chapter – on 'The Politics of Production' is hardly light reading but it is clear, meticulous and accurate. Similarly his treatment of Rank is impressively thorough, though one of his conclusions: that 'in Rank films of the 1950s, women are biddable creatures who enjoy the supposed benefits of the patriarchal order' (p. 56), is contradicted by what he tells us about strong British expatriate wives – and the splendidly self-sufficient band of women led by Virginia McKenna in *A Town Like Alice*. His chapter on Associated British is exemplary in making what is generally assumed to be the dullest of the British studios appear complex and interesting. His exploration of the role played by Robert Clark as production executive

and Frederick Gotfurt as scenario editor helps make sense of the seemingly haphazard production strategy. The chapter on censorship is drier, but solidly researched and usefully informative.

Harper's best chapter is the one on Hammer, which is illuminated by genuine and original insights into the films. She describes the threat in the Quatermass films as

> Quivering, moist, and formless, it can engulf anything, and make it like itself. The monster is a female Proteus, and an index of unconscious fears of the vagina and of the birth process; of the terror evoked by the womb. (p. 145)

She also offers perceptive analysis of the company's 'canny' production and distribution strategy. Surprisingly, her chapter on visual style is weaker than her chapters on British Lion and Ealing, to which she brings a fresh – and distinctly polemical – point of view. One does not have to agree with her to recognize the useful new knowledge she has trawled from previously unused letters and documents in the BFI Special Collections and the PRO.

One of the best things about *British Cinema of the 1950s* is the way in which it displays the restrictions and limitations imposed on those engaged in commercial filmmaking. But empathy with the problems of entrepreneurial producers leads Porter and Harper to adopt a stance creepily close to that New Labourite combination of contempt for socialist good intentions and indulgence towards the rich and stupid. Free Cinema is condemned for its 'corrosive elitism' and for providing 'fodder for bourgeois intellectuals' (pp. 189–90); Muriel Box for 'feminist views which were too strident for the period' (p. 161); the NFFC, which propped up the industry throughout the decade for a fraction of the budget annually consumed by the present-day Film Council, is given only grudging credit; and the greatest sin of the group of directors who successfully pulled British Lion out of the doldrums is that they were 'ferociously anti-American' (p. 110). The misdeeds of Sir John Davis are amply chronicled, but descriptions of his 'nimble ideological shift', his adherence to a 'more dynamic meritocratic order' (p. 39), and his 'organisational nous' (p. 55) give the mistaken impression that he was some sort of loveable rogue.

Harper and Porter succeed in their task of showing that the 1950s was a dynamic and interesting period for British cinema; nonetheless, they sometimes seem to go out of their way to be negative. If George Minter 'lost his direction and the company's output plummeted', how come *Kine Weekly* was trumpeting his 'big successes' and claiming he had 'struck it rich' a couple of years later? (p. 164). Sydney Box, despite expressing 'his now unfashionable socialist views with an offensive directness' (p. 159) and becoming 'increasingly excluded from the meritocracy' (p. 162), still somehow functioned as a successful independent producer throughout the decade. The films of J. Lee Thompson, and to a lesser extent Lewis Gilbert and Brian

Desmond Hurst are treated as worthy of respect, as are those made for Hammer and Anglo-Amalgamated. But too often 'failed to make much impact at the box-office' is used as an excuse for not taking a film seriously, and many more are dismissed as 'indifferently directed' or 'lacklustre'. Pat Jackson's *White Corridors* is a 'stately hospital epic' (p. 194), Philip Leacock's *The Brave Don't Cry* is 'worthy but ponderous' (p. 187), and *Nowhere To Go*, a clever, innovatively stylish film, brilliantly photographed by Paul Beeson and directed by Seth Holt, is lumped along with other late Ealing films as 'lacklustre' and condemned for looking 'like a poor American B-feature, with clumsy plotting and incoherent protagonists' (p. 71). Such impatient dismissals devalue the rigorous scholarship which makes this meticulously researched book a groundbreaking study on an unfairly neglected period of the history of British cinema.

As one would expect from Harper and Porter, there are few factual mistakes, though, like Gillett, they have a problem with Robert Newton. Pantomime-like though his performance is, he played Long John Silver not Captain Hook in *Treasure Island* (p. 121).

Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, 338 pp.

CHARLENE REGESTER

Disintegrating the Musical aims to deconstruct the intersection of race, cultural practices and cinematic constructions of the musical genre produced by Hollywood cinematic conventions, in addition to deconstructing musicals produced outside the mainstream US cinema industry to interrogate the collusion of these intersecting variables as they inform both the industry and culture of a prevailing racial discourse. Knight achieves this goal successfully through his carefully crafted interrogation, as well as his critical engagement of the competing and, at times, coinciding debates that dominate this discourse. He professes that this study was initially motivated by his desire to understand how Hollywood represented African–Americans with and through musical performance, as the industry incessantly linked blackness to music in the cinematic imagination, particularly in musicals from 1929 to 1959. Moreover, he investigates how race-film producers selected Hollywood to express the African–American musical genre, how audiences reacted to these conventions, what meaning these cinematic constructions have for such audiences, and how these conventions continue to affect audiences in a more contemporary period. In tackling this investigative inquiry, Knight starts by discussing the impact and influence of minstrels as they were transformed on the screen, and ends most appropriately with a discussion of contemporary representations of blackface minstrelsy in Joel and Ethan Coen's, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*, clearly giving his study legitimacy, inextricably linking the past to the present.

In each section of the book Knight provides the historical context within which to develop his argument and makes a convincing case for

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the positions articulated. For example, in the introduction the strength of this discussion evolves from the views of W.E.B. DuBois and the ideology of Langston Hughes. The debate centres on integration – a word that he applies to the racial politics of the black presence in musicals. According to Knight, integration is infused with three significant meanings: one (in his opinion, the least important of the three) demonstrating how the Hollywood industry vertically integrated the business of film; the second, DuBois's proposition on integration couched as mass industrial integration and racial-social segregation; and the third, 'a formal quality specific to the musical, defined in the strict sense as a feature-length, narrative stage and film genre' (p. 13). Drawing upon the positions of scholars such as Gerald Mast, Rick Altman, Jane Feuer and Richard Dyer, Knight argues that 'the integrated musical is a response to the alienating, disorienting, and violently contradictory aspects of mass industrial integration and social integration' (p. 15). Knight then proposes his theory of dis/integration by stating:

> In the face of the integrated musical, African American performers, spectators, and critics developed methods of dis/integration, sometimes taking DuBoisian advantage of segregation always watching and listening for – and often seeking to create – failures of utopian form and feeling out of which new forms and feeling might emerge, and seldom giving up on the complex possibilities of the 'gift' – sometimes refashioned as a joke, assault, or evasion – of African American music. (pp. 16–17)

The first chapter, 'Wearing and Tearing the Mask', in its exploration of blackface minstrelsy, concentrates on the divided opinion that existed on this art form in the black press. While some members of the black press supported this practice, others were adamantly opposed. Investigating live black blackface performance, Knight contends that 'black blackface formed around – and worked to release or ameliorate – a knot of anxieties, tensions, pressures, and contradictions in the lives of blacks in America. This knot was staged as a set of apparently stacked binary oppositions: black/white, dark/light, south/north, country/city, powerless/powerful, lower-class/middle-class, male-female' (p. 42). Knight proposes that despite the debates that ensued, blackface should not be read as purely a racist and alienating practice but perhaps should be re-interrogated for its protective purposes, serving to protect both whites from blacks as well as blacks from whites.

In Knight's second chapter, '"Fool Acts": Cinematic Conjunctions of White Blackface and Black Performance', he challenges many of the prevailing views on the utility of blackface minstrelsy particularly during the transition to sound, and poses that the reason blackface works comically is because it does not work narratively. Examining what he terms white blackface (when white performers appear in black

face) as a cinematic construction, particularly in Al Jolson's films such as *The Jazz Singer*, *Mammy*, *Big Boy*, *The Singing Fool*, and so on, he presents these representations as juxtaposed to Jolson's relationship with the black community, according to reports from the black press. Knight proposes that as much as blackface is a mask, so too is whiteface – a position that calls for a return to Richard Dyer's argument on the dominance of whiteness, despite the fact that whiteness is posited as nothing in particular. Knight then expands his discussion to other films that appropriated the blackface performance on screen, leading him to conclude that:

> Mass mediated blackface had made clear for African American critics, and probably for larger black audiences, that pleasure or criticism internal to black communities and audiences could no longer be enough; they had to struggle to articulate cultural and political alternatives to blackface that would be obviously different from – disconnected from – blackface, even to white audiences disinclined to see such difference. (p. 91)

The third chapter explores what Knight terms 'black blackface' cinematic representations (where black performers appear in blackface) observed in Oscar Micheaux's *The Darktown Revue* and *Ten Minutes to Live*, as well as in the Hollywood-produced films *Dimples* and *Stormy Weather*. Of *Darktown Revue*, Knight contends that 'Davis's blackface number makes clear that form and content (here performance and "text") are both always related and always separable, and the form is genius while the content is nonsense' (p. 101). As for *Ten Minutes to Live*, Knight declares that it 'neither embraces nor scorns black blackface, as it appears the two comic's diegetic audience members might be inclined to do; rather, it confronts it as a complex cultural legacy and a tool, a critical reminder of the past in the present' (p. 105). This is particularly interesting in view of the new scholarship on Micheaux's filmmaking practices and of why a black filmmaker might resort to employing the very same practices that marginalized them in the larger mainstream culture. According to Knight, in *Dimples*, black actor Stepin Fetchit assumed the mask of blackface, leaving audiences unable to discern how these antics differed from those in his non-masked performances. Knight suggests that 'the mask could not consistently convey intention, awareness, or even mutability and skill; for most African American viewers Fetchit's blackface mask conveyed the opposite qualities, and his performance became fully recuperable' (p. 106). Regarding *Stormy Weather*, Knight examines the notion of indefinite talk and concludes that while the film hints at whiteface and introduces black blackface, the blues and innuendo-laden dialogue, the film is fraught with failings.

Stormy Weather's liberal progressive plot gradually eliminates these

> practices, flattening (and whitening?) black culture – making the indefinite definite – and leaving no space, not even the space of black blackface, for explicitly considering whiteness, the uniqueness and commonalities of black and white American cultures, or, beyond the magic of the cinematic audiovisual dissolve and the generic coincidence, a sense of how or whether to escape or modify the blackfaced, minstrelizing past, which was still so present. (p. 119)

In Part II of Knight's book its focus, in three chapters, shifts to musicals with either predominantly black or all-black casts. 'Black Folk Sold: Hollywood's Black-cast Musicals' includes examinations of *Hearts in Dixie*, *Hallelujah*, *The Green Pastures*, *Cabin in the Sky*, *Stormy Weather*, *Carmen Jones*, *St. Louis Blues* and *Porgy and Bess*. Knight grounds his discussion in the production dynamics of the film criticisms that existed among black film critics, and the history surrounding the inception of these films. Drawing upon the views of Malcolm X, Knight suggests that *Stormy Weather* allows history and memory to interject this notion of 'carrying on'. 'Hollywood carrying on becomes legible as carrying out (here, from within the government-approved system) a subversive cultural politics of style, one dedicated not just to enduring or having fun, but also to demanding and commanding recognition' (p. 158). The latter musicals reviewed in this chapter that similarly evolved from a folk tradition are connected to the advent of integration.

'Aping Hollywood: Deformation and Mastery in *The Duke is Tops* and *Swing*' examines race films or films produced by companies designed to create films to appeal to black film audiences. With *The Duke is Tops*, Knight suggests that many filmmakers attempted to ape Hollywood and that reversal was a method employed to escape this practice, but to do so involved refocusing. According to Knight, *Swing*, in comparison 'does not create a masterful mimicking of a white world while leaving whiteness out; rather, it continually points to the reality of race, and finally, reveals it as the vortex of a constant cycle of mastery and deformation distilled into the presence of a single, representative white man' (p. 194).

The final chapter explores the jazz film, *Jammin' the Blues* – a film that worked to emphasize at once the creativity and humanity of Africa–American musicians to be colour blind and to be racially mixed, when 'such simultaneity was not yet widely acceptable' (p. 230). Again, Knight situates his discussion within the context of scholars who have written on jazz, and skilfully deconstructs how the artists are positioned on screen along with their music to convey how this film successfully achieves its goal. Knight declares that the film 'attempts to transform its viewers from outsiders to insiders, from voyeurs and eavesdroppers to acknowledged audience members and possible participants' (pp. 222–3). Perhaps most revealing in this chapter is

Knight's revelation of the segregated practices that many jazz artists confronted both in cultivating their craft as well as in their attempt to make the transition to the screen.

In the book's conclusion Knight compares *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* to *Bamboozled*, since both films returned to blackface as a means of deconstructing the mask while positioning it within a more contemporary period of racial politics. Knight proffers that blackface in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* is a 'throwaway effect', while in *Bamboozled*, it is an 'obsession' (p. 237). He suggests that in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, whites and blacks conclude the film, singing the same song, yet traveling away from each other, while *Bamboozled* ends with the message that for blacks 'there is no such thing as just singin' and dancin'', to which Knight adds 'There never was' (p. 248).

Although the first section of the book is more focused on blackface as a way of approaching racial representation, that Knight's overarching second section focuses more intently on musicals could be a little misleading. Yet, his chapter on jazz music and musicians was so insightfully developed that I wondered if he were a musician himself. However, in the final analysis, the rigour with which he interrogates the past as a way of reading the present is clearly the mark of a scholar who has left an indelible impression in the field. For those researching black film history, race and representation, and musicals, this work is pivotal and cannot be ignored.

Greg M. Smith, *Film Structure and the Emotion System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 221 pp.

DANIEL BARRATT

Given the significant role emotion plays in both our everyday lives and our experience of art, historically the subject of emotion has been strangely neglected in both the sciences and the humanities. In the last twenty or so years, however, emotion has become something of a hot topic of research in both philosophy and psychology. And in the last ten or so years, this development has been reflected in film studies by the interdisciplinary enterprise known as cognitive film theory. A small group of theorists have offered 'cognitivist' accounts of filmic emotions: for instance, Noël Carroll focuses on our reactions of fear and disgust to the monster in horror films; Ed Tan argues that our primary emotion when viewing a film is one of 'interest'; whilst Torben Grodal describes the way in which we emotionally process a film's 'narrative flow'.[1] Greg M. Smith's *Film Structure and the Emotion System* is the latest welcome addition to this field of enquiry. In this book, Smith acknowledges the value of his predecessors' work, before developing both an alternative model of the film viewer's 'emotion system' and a new approach to film criticism.[2]

How should we go about investigating our emotional relationship to film? From the outset, Smith tackles this question with admirable honesty and clarity, showing a refreshing awareness of objectives and methodology. In the introductory chapter, he outlines ten 'desiderata' which any approach to the filmic emotions should attempt to satisfy. In addition to stressing the importance of specific and empirically-grounded explanations, Smith acknowledges the need to cover a wide range of films, to consider aspects of film style and to account for emotional differences between individual viewers – areas which the sceptic might assume lie outside the scope of a more scientifically-

1 Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990); Ed S. Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine*, trans. Barbara Fasting (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996); Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: a New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

2 Smith has also co-edited a recent anthology of articles which examines filmic emotions from a cognitivist perspective: Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (eds), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). See Smith's 'Local emotions, global moods, and film structure', pp. 103–26.

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oriented project. The first part of the book is dedicated to developing a new approach to filmic emotions that satisfies the desiderata in question. According to the *prototypical view of emotion* advanced by many cognitivists – including Carroll, Tan and Grodal – emotions have 'object-', 'goal-' and 'action-orientation'. To take an archetypal example, if we encounter a threatening bear in the woods, the object of our emotion is the bear itself, the goal in operation is self-preservation, whilst the appropriate action is to run in the opposite direction – preferably as quickly as possible. (This type of example lends itself to our understanding of mainstream narrative films which usually feature purposeful characters facing various obstacles, and so forth.) Smith argues, however, that many emotional states do not fit the prototype in question: for instance, happiness inspired by a sunny day does not seem to have a precise object, whilst depression is not obviously functional. How, then, should we account for our emotional experiences? Drawing on an impressive range of research from cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience, Smith proposes an *associative network model of the emotion system* in which 'multiple input channels' are linked to a system of 'emotion nodes' via a network of associative connections; the greater the number of 'emotion cues' presented to the input channels, the greater the likelihood that the corresponding emotion node will be activated. Although there are some 'universals' in the emotion system, different viewers in different cultures will build up different networks of associations through personal and sociocultural experience. Smith builds on this model by making a crucial distinction which has not been recognized by film theorists so far. Contrary to popular belief, empirical research suggests that emotions only tend to last for a matter of seconds or minutes. So how can we account for the apparent longevity of our emotional experiences? The answer lies in a set of 'orienting states' commonly known as *moods* which may persist for hours or even days. Significantly, Smith describes an interactive relationship between the two phenomena: moods incline us to experience certain emotions – by, for example, directing our attention to congruent stimuli in our environment – whilst emotions incline us to experience certain moods.

So far so good. But how does the associative network model apply to film itself? Given the short-lived nature of emotion, Smith proposes that a film's primary aim is to 'cue' moods in the viewer; indeed, his project was originally entitled 'Movie Moods'. In light of this aim, he introduces the *mood-cue approach* as a way of analyzing the 'emotional appeals' of filmic texts. The emotion cues presented by film include: a character's facial, bodily and vocal expressions; dialogue, sound and music; mise-en-scene, camera-work and editing (p. 42). In this respect, then, the importance of film style is acknowledged. Smith initially demonstrates the approach – and associated terminology – with a series of short analyses. Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), for instance, is described as a 'densely informative' emotional

film; in order to establish and maintain the mood of fear and excitement, the opening sequence presents a series of 'emotion markers' – configurations of 'redundant' emotion cues – to elicit 'bursts' of the corresponding emotions. Bill Forsyth's *Local Hero* (1983), on the other hand, is described as a 'sparsely informative' emotional film; considering its understated subject matter, the film presents fewer redundant emotion cues – primarily of a comedic nature – although the pacing of emotion cueing changes as the film progresses.

In the second part of the book, Smith presents a series of extended case studies, using each study to demonstrate different aspects of the associative network model and the mood-cue approach. He begins with an analysis of a film usually addressed from a psychoanalytic-feminist perspective: namely, King Vidor's *Stella Dallas* (1937). Smith demonstrates how the film establishes an appropriate 'emotional orientation' – maternal melodrama as opposed to love story – by densely cueing the appropriate 'genre microscript' in the 'moonlit walk scene', before describing how the film encourages us to move from 'feeling for' to 'feeling with' Barbara Stanwyck's portrayal of Stella by altering the state of our narrational knowledge. An admirable feature of Smith's project is that he is equally concerned with explaining the failure of films to elicit the desired emotions in the viewer; at least half of the case studies follow this particular line of enquiry, revealing a number of insights about the workings of the emotion system which would not be apparent from studying the scientific literature alone. Recall, for instance, that moods tend to persist over time. In a discussion of the 'inertia' of the emotion system, Smith argues that a 'radical shift' thirty-six minutes into Jean Renoir's *The Lower Depths* (1936) accounts for our failure to make the transition between the moods of bemusement and despair. The 'storm sequence' in Renoir's *A Day in the Country* (1936), on the other hand, allows us successfully to make the transition between the moods of light romance and melancholia. Of particular interest is a discussion of the 'limitations' of the emotion system: Smith suggests that Wayne Wang's *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) – which features four mother–daughter pairs and eight flashback sequences – may 'overwhelm' our emotional capacities by presenting us with an excessive number of emotional situations. This type of explanation seems to account for the feeling of emotional exhaustion we occasionally experience when walking out of the cinema.

The task of integrating scientific and humanistic research is a difficult and important one. Smith's recognition of the possibilities of the associative network and the significance of moods alone marks his project as a valuable contribution to the field of film studies. In addition, the mood-cue approach is an original and productive way of analyzing the emotional appeals of filmic texts, providing the film critic with a scientific grounding in the emotions and a more precise vocabulary for textual analysis. Having acknowledged the shortcomings of the prototypical view of emotion, however, Smith may

go too far in the opposite direction when he claims that associations form the 'foundation' of all emotional phenomena (p. 23). Although he refers to 'conscious thought' as another channel of processing (pp. 30–31), he has little to say about the role that cognition plays in our emotional lives; for instance, the type of appraisal we might make when encountering the proverbial bear in the woods. When Smith talks about 'narrative situations' and 'emotion scripts' in the later sections, he seems to be referring to phenomena which cannot be accounted for in straightforwardly associative terms. In a related fashion, the term 'emotion cue' is occasionally used in an overly general sense, thus failing to satisfy the desideratum regarding specificity. As Smith concludes, however, with an openness which characterizes the entire book, his project only represents 'a step toward a better understanding' (pp. 172–3). Another research project, then, would be to integrate Smith's primarily associative approach with the more obviously cognitivist (and narrative-based) approaches of, say, Tan and Grodal, by developing a model which posits *two* principal routes to emotion – one based on associative networks and the other on cognitive appraisal. In providing a solid foundation upon which to work and in opening up productive avenues of enquiry, therefore, Smith's book is undoubtedly a step in the right direction.

Mary Anne Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002, 288 pp.

BRUCE BENNETT

Mary Anne Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* is an ambitious attempt to situate the development of cinema in relation to its broad historical context. The book concentrates on the ways in which time – the 'problem' of time and its representability – was addressed both by photographers and early filmmakers, but also by thinkers in a number of other contemporary (and not obviously related) fields such as physics, biology and statistics.

Time was a central problem during the period of rapid industrialization in Europe and the USA in the 1800s, with the dominant imperatives of efficiency, coordination and speed. In this context time became a scarce resource, a commodity requiring careful management, and thus one of the characteristics of late nineteenth-century culture is that time was experienced in a new way – 'as a weight, as a source of anxiety, and as an acutely pressing problem of representation' (p. 4). Doane argues that the development of photography, cinema and sound recording in this period should be understood in relation to these concerns with the measurement and representation of time – time as historical event, time as movement. One of the manifestations of such anxieties about time is an increasing concern with the contingent, the random, the unpredictable heterogeneous event.

Doane observes that processes such as the standardization of time (with the construction of railway networks whose timetables required the abandonment of local time in favour of national or standard times) and the regulation of the working day are effects of the temporal rationalization that accompanies industrialization and, more broadly,

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capitalism. This process of rationalization (and, consequently, subject formation) requires the containment or management of the disruptive potential of contingency, chance or unpredictability, and Doane proposes that 'emerging technologies of representation' offer various crucial means of recording, arresting, fragmenting and reconstructing time (p. 11). Among these emergent technologies are the multiple-camera motion studies begun in the 1870s by Eadweard Muybridge, and Etienne-Jules Marey's development of chronophotography in the 1880s, which allowed successive exposures on a single photographic plate. These technologies facilitate the presentation of events as ordered and meaningful so that cinematic storytelling involves the 'narrativizing of chance', taming the arbitrariness and unpredictability of modern life, subsuming it to a linear structure and logical causality, and thereby reinforcing the identity of the contemporary urban subject. As Doane explains, 'In narrative, the contingency, singularity and uniqueness associated with the bourgeois notion of the individual can be yoked to a meaning guaranteed by his or her mortality' (p. 107).

In the face of these wide-reaching processes of rationalization, however, Doane suggests that contingency and unpredictability, or immediacy and presence, came to hold an increasing fascination. Contingency is the excess that threatens continually to disrupt the systems that are designed to contain and efface it, and thereby also threatens the integrity of the rational, industrial subject. Doane thus describes contingency as both 'lure and threat' in the context of capitalist modernity, emerging in the late nineteenth century 'as a form of resistance to rationalization which is saturated with ambivalence' (p. 11).

Photography embodies this ambivalence since it can apparently freeze time/motion into still images, rendering otherwise imperceptible movements and configurations visible. At the same time, however, photography's capacity to represent singular, instantaneous events and movements has a destabilizing effect since it shows time as infinitely divisible and heterogeneous. Temporal linearity and narrative coherence are destroyed.

The history of the technical development of cinema has been well documented elsewhere, with many competing accounts of the ways that elements of pre-cinematic toys and entertainments such as magic lanterns, phenakistoscopes and zoetropes were combined with improvements in camera mechanisms, faster films and experiments in sequential photography to produce cinematographic films for projection. Doane's book avoids any such straightforward narratives, although her book foregrounds some of the most familiar figures from accounts of early cinema, primarily the Lumière brothers and Georges Méliès, Thomas Edison and Edwin S. Porter. While the notion of cinema as technology is important here – and the spectacle of new technology is a much noted feature of its initial appeal to audiences that has continued to characterize the introduction of new audiovisual

technologies through to the most recent mobile video phones – the book does not dwell on the specificity and development of this technology, eschewing a technologically deterministic account.

Instead, Doane's book undertakes a wide-ranging and detailed survey of contemporary scientific and academic thought in different fields, stressing the ways in which the problem of time and contingency was theorized, and the interconnectedness of these different fields. Photography and cinema are portrayed as emerging from this context but the argument avoids positing a simple causal relationship in which cinema is a symptomatic product of this society. For example, Doane notes that discussions of thermodynamics tend to draw on film as an illustrative tool for explaining a concept such as entropy, the basis of the second law of thermodynamics. Entropy is the tendency of energy to be dispersed from a concentrated point into its surroundings, and this uni-directional process is often explained through use of the example of film since, as Doane observes, 'film is popularly understood as *the* exemplar of temporal irreversibility, as the most effective means of clarifying the idea of an "arrow of time"' (p. 117). Thus, film is discussed as a metaphor or a concept, an illustrative figure for thinking through certain problems, which operates across disciplinary boundaries. Doane is concerned with the way early cinema (as object or machine) is thought about or imagined, as well as with the ways of seeing and ways of thinking that are facilitated by the cinema.

The book tracks the complex sets of connections and influences between practice and thought in a number of fields, all of which share the concern with the theorization of time, and the ideological containment of temporal heterogeneity, of contingency or indeterminacy. Doane notes, for instance, that theories of thermodynamics had wide implications throughout the nineteenth century for our understanding of time and the operation of systems, since these ideas were disseminated beyond the realm of physics across a range of more or less related areas, such as literature, biology, information theory and psychoanalysis. Similarly, Doane observes that Darwin's theory of evolution posits random mutation or contingency as a positive force for change in natural selection, and stresses the impact of this theory, especially 'the idea that chance begets order', on philosophy, physics, chemistry, sociology and history (p. 96).

Turning to psychoanalysis, Doane suggests that time was also an obsession for Freud throughout his career, although it remained marginal to his work. She notes that Freud returns again and again to the problem of adequately theorizing time, employing an armoury of illustrative devices and metaphors such as the microscope and the 'mystic writing pad', before finally pathologizing time as traumatizing and unrepresentable. Of course, Freud famously shunned cinema and Doane speculates that in its emphasis on visibility and the surface, 'the cinema must have struck him as a veritable reservoir of meaninglessness' (p. 167). But, as she notes, Freud's project of

theorizing consciousness and memory can be related to the contemporaneous technical problems of recording/inscription and storage faced by Marey in developing chronophotography, suggesting that both are concerned with the possibility of the legible representability of time.

In this historical context, cinema more than photography appears to offer a means of making time visible, of representing contingent reality in a coherent and meaningful way, making it available for interpretation and analysis. In this respect the temporal linearity of cinema and the development of narrative film serve an important psychical and ideological function in ordering and regulating time in order to stabilize the subjective identity produced by the over-stimulating environment of industrial modernity where the individual is assaulted by a deluge of images, noises and the disorienting sensation of acceleration. Narrative cinema thus has a protective function, holding back the flood of sensory stimuli that threaten to overwhelm the defences of the individual, through the provision of a structuring system whereby time can be represented visually.

Doane is well aware of the paradoxes inherent in photography and cinema, such as the indexical capacity of photography appearing to give access to an unmediated and overwhelming present at the same time as it consigns it to the past, historicizing it immediately and relegating it to dead time. Cinema, on the other hand, represents movement, or produces the visual effect of movement, but is composed of still images, which leaves open the question of where time is inscribed or captured. As Doane notes, Zeno's paradox has frequently been invoked in discussions of cinema in order to note that, no matter how small the interval between successive film frames, an individual image nevertheless fails to capture motion (except as visual distortion such as blurring). And, of course, photography and cinema are important contributors to the sensory overload accompanying the rapid development of new media technologies in later modernity, even as they offer representational strategies for shielding the subject from this sensory assault.

This is an interesting and very detailed book, which is exemplary in its inter-disciplinary reach and its capacity to shift interpretative scale, moving from close analysis of Edison films, for instance, to overviews of their cultural context. However, one of the consequences of Doane's project to situate the development of cinema in relation to the intellectual environment of Europe and the USA is that cinema tends to be categorized within the culturally prestigious tradition of fine art and the sciences, rather than the less respectable traditions of commercial popular entertainment. While in itself this is not a problem (and in any case the distance between the freak show and the educational medical exhibition has never been that great), and the book complicates this separation somewhat, nevertheless this categorization allows Doane to overstate the extent of changes wrought by the cinema. For example,

she suggests that the (mechanically) fixed pace at which a projected film proceeds involves a new sort of spectatorial relationship and subjective identity for the viewer of artworks, since she/he has less control over the experience: 'Unlike previous forms of visual representation, in which comprehension *took time* (writing, sculpture, painting), the cinema, because it was mechanical, subjected its spectator to the time of its own inexorable and unvarying forward movement' (p. 108). However, if we situate cinema in a tradition of other audiovisual time-based precedents such as music hall and vaudeville shows, illustrated lectures and magic lantern shows, theatre and opera, all of which involve predetermined performances which unfold at a set pace, the periodizing distinction between the subjective experience of the new medium and earlier media is much less clear-cut.

Doane's book undertakes a critical engagement with film history and, as she notes, this is not incompatible with the revisionist work of film historians such as Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault. Gunning and Gaudreault coined the term 'cinema of attractions' to stress the connection between early cinema and an established culture of popular spectacular and largely non-narrative entertainments such as thrill rides, peep shows and fairground attractions. In doing so they challenge the progressive teleological assumptions of film historians who had tended to treat early cinema as a 'primitive' and unsuccessful form of narrative cinema, the first faltering steps towards the mature, formally sophisticated classical cinema that would develop, so the accounts go, over the next two or three decades. Thus, the cinema of attractions is identified as a point of historical and historiographic rupture, challenging the notion of a smooth, linear historical (biological) development of the medium from its 'birth' in 1895. In arguing that contingency is central to the work of both Lumière and Méliès, Doane challenges the well-established view that their films represent two opposed possibilities for cinema: the realism of the Lumière films and the celebration of the fantastic running through Méliès's oeuvre. However, while it may seem that rethinking cinema in relation to contingency, placing contingency or excess at the centre of the filmmaking practices of Lumière and Méliès might lead us radically to rethink the place of contingency or excess in subsequent cinema, Doane reaffirms the notion of classical cinema's historical victory (over chance or excess), claiming that 'The temporal contingency celebrated by Méliès and Lumière is tamed through its incorporation into a rigidly codified system of producing a temporality that can fully absorb the spectator' (p. 138). Thus, one of the frustrations of this book is that it does not pursue some of the more radical implications of its critical foregrounding of contingency in relation to a broader historical range. Doane does tentatively suggest that there are connections between early cinema and later audiovisual media, noting a continuity between the indexical fascination Lumiere's *actualités* held for audiences, and the attraction of the liveness promised by broadcast television and the

internet: 'The ideologies of instantaneity, of temporal compression, of the lure of the present moment that emerge in this period have not disappeared; they confront us in the form of digital technologies' (p. 20). While new media are outside the historically specific range of Doane's book, it would have been appropriate for the book to explore the nature of this persistent lure in more detail since it would offer a means of holding open some of the questions raised by the book, challenging the apparent historical closure constituted by classical cinema.

One of the ways in which the book does attempt to resist closing off such questions is through an apparently arbitrary and anachronistic shift of focus, at its conclusion, to a discussion of cinephilia. Doane argues that cinephilia, with its connoisseurial attention to marginal detail, is another field of theorization or interpretation that is specifically concerned with the contingent. Cinephilia is generally understood to be nostalgic and 'It is arguable that cinephilia could not be revived at this conjecture were the cinema *not* threatened by the accelerating development of new electronic and digital forms of the media' (p. 228). However, in asserting that cinephilia is a utopian celebration of the contingent, Doane argues that cinephilia is concerned not with an ossified or fetishized model of cinema, but with the resistant and heterogeneous potential of contingency which extends beyond cinema into the much more dispersed field of what we might call the 'cinematic': 'From this perspective the desire fuelling cinephilia will not die with the cinema as we know it. Cinephilia is only a slightly illicit subset of a larger and ongoing structure of the access to the contingent' (p. 231). Thus, this invocation of the obsessive passion for films serves as an unexpected way of opening up the book's arguments onto a wider historical perspective, extending beyond the period Doane analyzes so thoroughly here, and beyond a restricted concept of cinema.